Whoso Findeth A Wife

BY

J. WESLEY PUTNAM

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NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY
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CHAPTER I

BY DEVIOUS WAYS

I

It was four oclock when Dunham's car swerved off the Avenue and came to an abrupt stop in front of a house in Fifty-fifth Street. Ralph Dunham stepped out briskly and slammed the door of the limousine sharply behind him.

"Wait!" he said to the chauffeur. And then he turned and climbed the short flight of steps that led to the Ferris' door. A moment later he had thrown off his fur-lined ulster and sat expectantly before the glowing library-grate of one of the most respectable houses in New York.

Dunham had come direct from his downtown

office. The day's work was finished. By turns he had schemed and fought and threatened and cajoled. The same hand that had hammered the desk in emphatic gesture in front of one caller had patted the back of another in propitiating friendship. It had set a bold, firm signature to some scores of letters which carried messages of various import, some pleasant and some of exceedingly ill omen, to as many men whose business trails crossed Dunham's path. And out of the never-ending struggle he had emerged as unwearied, strong and indomitable as the day when a dozen years before he had come out of the West, that vast breeding place of giants, and thrown himself joyfully into the thick of the financial fray.

Dunham's glance roved appraisingly about the big room. He appreciated and envied the dignified furnishings of the place. The whole decorative scheme breathed a respectability, an evidence of social assurance, that the best of the Fifth Avenue decorators had failed to impart to his own luxurious bachelor house. A

less astute man than Dunham would have told himself in this connection that there were some things money could not buy. But as it happened, Dunham was intent upon a purchase of this very commodity that he lacked, and needed. In fact, his presence in the Ferris' house was due to his determination to acquire the one thing that the metropolis had jealously refused to yield up to him—unimpeachable social position. And as he sat there waiting, a quiet but insistent force that would not be denied, he was certain that he had made no mistake in the market-place. The wares were there. And Dunham knew that they could be bought. Well—he had the price! And fortunately for the success of his undertaking, spiritual considerations did not enter into his scheme of life. He did not doubt, deep within his consciousness, that when the time came he could square himself with the Almighty. Why should he? He had never yet known failure.

He heard his name, enunciated in a woman's low-pitched, cultivated tones, and found him-

self shaking hands with Stephen Ferris' wife. Margaret Ferris looked at the big, dark figure with an interest which she took no pains to conceal as the two stood facing each other for a moment. She felt the brute force of the man. Even his hand-clasp, careful (not gentle) as it was of her long, slim fingers, struck her as hiding a steely strength that she was unaccustomed to. This man and those of her world were made of different stuff.

"Mr. Ferris has just come in," she said. "If you will be so good as to come upstairs we can talk undisturbed in his study." And Dunham followed her up the wide staircase.

II

As they entered the room Stephen Ferris rose from his desk.

"Glad to see you, Dunham," he said. "How are you?"

"Very well," Dunham answered. "And you?"

"Quite fit, thanks." And as his wife sat

down at one end of the long leather davenport, Ferris waved Dunham to an armchair. He hesitated for a moment, and looked inquiringly at his guest. A striking contrast marked the two men. Ferris, slender, narrow-shouldered, immaculately dressed, was no different from a hundred of his kind. An unbroken line of city-bred men before him had bequeathed to him an air of unstudied ennui that was marred only by a few lines of worry that stamped themselves indelibly upon his features. Fifty years of ease had not fitted him to face impending disaster with the resolve to conquer.

Ralph Dunham knew the type. Men of Ferris' ilk had served his purpose often enough. He noted with satisfaction the pile of papers that lay strewn upon his host's desk —bills, unmistakably,—bills unpaid and pressing, the ever-increasing incubus which sooner or later fastens itself upon the luckless, shrinking shoulders of the world's idlers. Three generations from shirt-sleeves to shirt-sleeves! Dunham believed in the old adage that came to

his mind. His mouth set grimly as he recalled his own shirt-sleeve days. They were not so far back. Well! he would play the good fairy and step in and avert the coatless calamity in Stephen Ferris' case. He would put fate to rout.

Meanwhile Margaret Ferris waited. It was to her that Dunham spoke.

"Mrs. Ferris, I may as well come to the point at once," he began. "I suppose your husband has told you of our conversation yesterday, at the Club?" he said inquiringly.

Margaret Ferris nodded silently.

"Yes," Dunham continued. "Well, the matter is quite simple to explain, then. Mr. Ferris' sale of his Federal Express holdings was what suggested this step to me. To put the case plainly, you need money. Not to-day, perhaps, nor to-morrow. But the proceeds of the sale of this stock will not last forever. It is just staving off the inevitable when one begins to live upon his principal." He turned to Ferris, who had reddened visibly under his

remarks. "An unpleasant topic, I know," Dunham continued. "But the contingency must be faced." He hesitated a moment. "It is possible, as I suggested to Mr. Ferris, that I may be of some assistance to you."

Margaret Ferris clasped her hands nervously.

"Oh! Mr. Dunham!" she exclaimed, "what you say is too true. I've seen it coming for three years: You don't know how I've worried! We've tried to cut down our expenses. But do what we will, it's no use. Whenever we save in one place, some unforseen demand arises and more than counterbalances. Steve has thought of going into business. But you know how difficult it is for a man to begin work for the first time at his age. His father got along very nicely on what Grandfather Ferris left him. But everything is so different now! It costs so frightfully to live! It's appalling the way the bills run up."

Ferris regarded his wife with surprise. He had heard all this often enough, in private.

But for Margaret to lay bare family secrets in this fashion was disconcerting, to say the least.

"There, there!" he broke in. "It's not so bad as that. You know how women will worry, Dunham. It's true, to be sure, that we poor rich feel the pressure of the cost of living. There are enough others in the same boat with us. But things aren't hopeless, you know. Now, if I could find just the right sort of business to bring in a few thousand a year extra, we'd do very nicely. I've been thinking quite seriously of buying a seat on the Exchange. In fact, I've nearly made up my mind to do it. However, if you've anything better to suggest, Dunham, out with it! Perhaps you have in mind a partnership of some sort?"

Dunham's face scarcely concealed the contempt which a man of his stamp always feels for the weakling, as he answered:

"Yes, something of the sort! A family partnership is what I have in mind."

"Family! I don't quite follow you," Ferris exclaimed.

"I'll explain," Ralph Dunham continued. "My plan involves your daughter."

"Elizabeth!" they both said quickly.

"Precisely. Let us say, for the sake of argument, that your daughter marries me. It's only reasonable to suppose that I would be disposed to do the right thing by her family."

Dunham watched his hearers narrowly as a look of surprise involuntarily passed between the two.

"I didn't come here to sound my praises as a son-in-law. I'll only say that your daughter could do worse. I'm older than she—oh! by eighteen or twenty years, I daresay—I'm forty next month. But I'm clean as men go. And if there are a good many unsmoothed angles about me there are other considerations to be thought of."

Ralph Dunham paused. That his proposal carried something of a shock he did not doubt. But he was accustomed to upsetting people's equanimity.

Margaret Ferris sat quite still. Her white

hands clutched the arm of the seat and her strained, eager face was eloquent of mingled doubt and hope. Ferris began to pace the room. And he was speaking faster than was his wont.

"This is an astounding suggestion," he was saying. "I'm not sure that we ought to listen to you."

Dunham noted with satisfaction that Ferris' eyes avoided his own. He knew the signs of tempted and wavering humanity.

"Do you know the girl at all?" Ferris asked abruptly.

"Very slightly," Dunham told him. "Just a howdy-do kind of acquaintance. She seems a shy sort. Only been out a short time, hasn't she?"

"Yes," Ferris replied.

"Not two years," his wife added.

"She may have other ideas of her own," Ferris said. "Of course she's to have her own way. We wouldn't think of influencing her in such a matter."

"Of course not," Dunham said. "But she's bound to marry some day, and why not me as well as anyone? And why not a little sooner as well as a little later? I wouldn't dream of asking you to insist upon your daughter's marriage to me if it were distasteful to her."

Margaret Ferris was silent. What mingled waves of emotion were surging within her she alone knew. But Dunham felt that her silence did not auger ill for his cause. It was a moment that tried even his well governed nerves. But he felt that he must press home his point before he left that room.

"Suppose you think the question over," he said suavely. "There isn't any special hurry, you know." And as he spoke his eyes sought the tell-tale varicolored heap of tradesmen's bills upon the desk. He knew that there lay the goad which must prick the couple on to a decision. "Perhaps it's just as well that we understand one another, however. Let me put the case clearly. Give me your consent to win

your daughter, and if I succeed I'll pay these debts—all of 'em''—and he waved a careless hand toward the desk—''and settle a million dollars on you.''

From Margaret Ferris' lips came a sudden inarticulate sound. Surprise, joy, hope, fear —it was impossible for Dunham to fathom that throaty sob. He turned to Ferris, who had stopped dead in his tracks and now stood facing him, with his eyes staring and his mouth foolishly opening and shutting. But his loose lips framed no words.

Dunham rose. ''Think it over,'' he said. ''And meantime if you've no objection I'd like to see a little more of Miss Elizabeth. Understand,—I won't say anything to her without hearing from you. But until you decide there can be no harm in such attentions as I may pay her.''

''Oh! no harm at all!'' Ferris hastened to answer, recovering from his sudden seizure. ''Of course your suggestion is—er—just a bit unusual, you know. And it has taken us so

completely by surprise that we shall have to give ourselves a little time to decide."

"Naturally," Dunham answered. "And now that we understand one another I must be on my way." He turned to take Mrs. Ferris' hand, when a knock at the door interrupted his adieu. Stephen and Margaret Ferris started guiltily.

"Come in!" Ferris called. And a girl entered.

"Oh! it's you, Elizabeth," Margaret said. "You know Mr. Dunham—"

"To be sure," Elizabeth Ferris answered evenly. Dunham took a small, well-gloved hand in his and murmured his pleasure.

"Jane said she thought I'd find you in Daddy's den," she told her mother. "I promised to drop in at Ann Jordan's tea. But I'll be back in plenty of time to go to the Hartleys' dinner with you."

"Very well, child," her mother said. "Good-by, Mr. Dunham! So glad to have seen you again!"

III

Dunham turned to Elizabeth Ferris.

"May I give you a lift in my car?" he asked.

"Oh! thank you, I was going to walk. It's not far you know—Eightieth Street." She made a bewitching picture, in her brown suit and sables, with little wisps of rebellious chestnut hair escaping beneath the close-fitting edges of her tailored hat. Dunham looked at her with immense approval.

"My car's just spoiling for exercise," he pleaded.

"Well then, I'll walk back. Good-by, dear people—" and she smiled brightly at her father and mother.

So they went away on that winter evening. And into the stream of cars that rolled majestically up Fifth Avenue Dunham's chauffeur skillfully piloted them. And the Lion and the Lamb were together in the blustering March twilight.

CHAPTER II

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

I

THE sound of the outer door shutting behind those two departing ones sounded dully in the ears of Stephen Ferris and his wife. Now that Dunham had gone, and the last sign of his presence had vanished with the echo of the closing door, the whole interview seemed to them both but some fantastic dream. Ferris sank into the chair behind the desk and looked wearily at the appalling testimonials of disaster that lay before him.

Margaret still sat leaning against the arm of the leather sofa, her chin resting upon both hands.

II

"Well!" Stephen said at last. "What do you think of it?"

"Of him?" she countered.

"Yes—what of him?"

"Not exactly the sort of son-in-law I'd have picked out! Still, he might be worse. There's this to say in his favor, Steve. He'll never be any worse than he is now. If he were younger, oh! ten years younger—his ultimate development might still be problematical. But he's mature. His personality, and his habits—mental and moral—are fixed for life."

"Oh! damn his habits! Men are all alike, underneath. Have you ever seen him eat soup, now? The chap gets on very well when he sits down and talks. But what's he like, I wonder, to—well, to live with? To take into one's family?"

"Don't worry about that sort of thing, Steve. Table manners are at a discount nowadays. They're the least valuable asset a man can have. I've often wished that your family had drilled less refinement into you—paid not so much attention to how gracefully you could live on money somebody else made, and put some

effort on teaching you how to earn some yourself."

Ferris looked wearily at his wife. He had often heard such complaints from her during the past three years. And he had long since learned the futility of attempting to stem the torrent of dissatisfaction that she poured upon him with unvarying regularity.

"What about Elizabeth?" he ventured, when she had finished. "Do you think she will ever agree to marry Dunham?"

"Why not?" she answered sharply. "What else would she do? Marry some young fool in her own set who's had the same sort of upbringing that her father's had? Not if I can help it, Steve! This is a brilliant match for her. It isn't every girl who has such a chance. They're as few—opportunities like this—as are fortunes the size of Ralph Dunham's. Just how much is he worth, Steve?"

Ferris shrugged his shoulders.

"Nobody knows," he said. "I doubt if the man knows himself. You hear all sorts of sto-

ries. Sixty—seventy millions,—that's what some think. But suppose he's only worth half that . . . it's enough. More than enough!"

Hard lines showed about Margaret Ferris' mouth. A score of minute wrinkles, those tell-tale marks of the workings of the mind within, bespoke worry, avarice, scheming.

"A million dollars!" she said, slowly. "It's nothing to a man like him. Little enough, I should say, in exchange for the position that Elizabeth would bring him! Many a man has spent more than that, vainly too, in the effort to display his wife's jewels in coveted places."

Stephen Ferris laughed. It was not a pleasant sound,—coming from his contemptuous, sneering lips.

"What do you want?" he asked her. "I might have known you wouldn't be satisfied. I suppose you think Dunham ought to make over half his holdings. If you want to know what I think,—it's a damned generous offer. A million dollars to be married! Not many men would be willing to pay that. If it were the

other way, now—a million to get unmarried! . . . well, I could appreciate that better."

Margaret Ferris paid no attention to her husband's sally.

"No, it's none too much. But I suppose beggars can't be choosers. And that's what we're fast becoming—beggars! That's what we'll be soon enough if Elizabeth plays the fool."

"You'll have to talk to her, Margaret," Ferris advised. "You'll know how to do it better than I. If this thing slips up the Lord knows what we'll do. With the debts paid and a clean million to work with, I'll go down on the Street and double it in no time."

Mrs. Ferris sat suddenly bolt upright and faced her husband.

"Where do I come in, pray?" she asked. "You flatter yourself, Steve, if you think you can grab all that money for yourself. If you had it you are just silly enough to throw it away inside of a year." She paused a moment, as if to let her words prepare him for what was

coming. "Half of it's to be mine, Steve," she said firmly. "Mine to do with as I like!"

Ferris glared at her.

"Don't be unreasonable," he said. "Who brought this fellow here, anyhow? You don't suppose I'm a child, do you, to be cheated out of what rightfully belongs to me? I expected to do something for you, naturally. But I might have known you wouldn't be satisfied with a square deal. It's a wonder you don't want it all."

"Only my share, Steve!" she replied. "You played with the money my father left me, and where is it now? And you made ducks and drakes of your own fortune. Now I'm going to manage for myself."

Ferris knew that her mind was made up.

"As you wish," he said, sourly, with little relish for the resignation that he knew must be his lot. "What's the use, after all, of quarreling over what we haven't got?"

Margaret Ferris paused, as she laid her hand on the doorknob.

"No, Steve," she said. "We haven't got it now. But it won't be my fault if we don't get it. Elizabeth simply has to marry soon. If she didn't it wouldn't be long before we'd be unable to do anything for her at all. And what chance has a girl without gowns, and a family that can entertain for her? As it is, things are growing shabby about the house. And we haven't a single decent car left. And how we're to get another goodness knows. The limousine has been out of commission for a week and Williams says he simply can't patch it together much longer. It's now or never! This man Dunham is a special dispensation of Providence sent for the relief of the pious. He's manna, Steve,—that's what he is!"

"Well, mind you don't crowd him too quickly down Eliabeth's throat."

"Trust me, Steve."

"I will . . . if I must," Stephen Ferris added, as his wife closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER III

THE LION AND THE LAMB

I

While her father and mother were haggling over the division of the spoils, the price of her purchase, Elizabeth was speeding gaily uptown in Dunham's car. She had met the man a few times at balls and dinners. But his occasional presence in her set was only of recent date. Though for years he had loomed large in the newspapers, it was rather in the fashionable restaurants, at the Opera and the Horse Show, that Dunham had become a familiar figure. In the innermost sanctified shrines of the old New York families he had penetrated only of late, and on few occasions. Elizabeth wondered mildly what could have brought him to her father's study. And then she promptly for-

got the matter. The present was sufficiently diverting.

Dunham was not a great talker. Where business was not concerned he never had much to say. But now and then he put in a word agreeably enough. In his thoughts there was much that would have astonished the pretty chatting creature at his side. He looked down at the soft whiteness of her cheek, ivory-like in the dusk of early evening, and there came over him a sudden desire to clasp her roughly in his arms. It was not love. Affection was something that Ralph Dunham had had no time for. But here was a woman who would some day be his—his to do with as he liked. He had no doubt of the outcome of his suit. The power of money was an influence he had reason to believe in. Would she shrink from him when the time came? He stretched out a hand and unseen by her touched the rich stuff of her suit; and then quickly drew away, with every nerve strung taut. He must not be hasty, he reflected.

They were nearing the Plaza, and Dunham said—

"You've time for a spin through the Park, haven't you?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Dunham," the girl answered. The suggestion surprised her. She had not regarded Dunham as a contemporary of hers—but rather of her parents. His age was obviously nearer theirs than her own. His offering her a lift in his car had been only common courtesy. But to take her for a ride in the Park, out of his way, and hers too, suddenly gave ground for a different construction of their relations.

Elizabeth Ferris, city-bred as she was and accustomed to such attentions from men as come naturally to an attractive girl of her class, was still unscorched by the flame of passion. There was something about her—a certain unmistakable virginal quality, that had made men careful in their treatment of her. She was the sort of girl whom no dancing partner, however voluptuous, would dare clasp closely.

Such maidens seem to possess some magic charm that enables them to move through life uncontaminated by unwholesome influences. Many girls who had made their débuts in the same season as she were already adepts at the game of hearts. Their eyes habitually shot a challenge out at every man they met, and they were ready to go far in the dangerous fields of sweet adventure.

But Elizabeth Ferris was made of finer clay. Dunham was sensible of this quality in his companion. Not that he had met it frequently. Indeed, the women he had known intimately were of a far different stamp. Since he had lived in the East he had had little time for feminine society. But in his younger days in the West, in mining camps and boom towns, he had known women. Then he had danced and drunk with the carelessness of unfettered youth. One girl had been no different from all her adventurous sisters. The same treatment answered for all. And Dunham had gone on his migratory way from one town to another in

blissful ignorance of the infinite variety of the gentler sex. Even in those days he had been a masterful man. Men had feared and hated him. But women had feared and loved him. And all the time he had fought his way steadily upward with scant regard for whosoever served his purpose either for play or profit, for gayety or gain.

But Dunham had had reason enough to realize that he now lived in an entirely different world. The ways of the New Yorker were not his ways. He soon discovered that the men who did business with him in the daytime did not idle with him at nighttime; that though he lunched with Harrington and Dumont and Battersby and others of their class, he never dined with them. And when some chance meeting brought him into fleeting contact with these men when they had their women folk with them introductions were likely to be conspicuous by their absence. Occasionally, as it now and then happened, he was presented to dowager or daughter. But the atmosphere was never con-

ducive to much informality. Conversation generally languished. Probably, he reflected, under their skins those haughty creatures were the same as Judy O'Grady. But superficially they were as different as another sex.

As the door to the social world swung slowly wider before him, Dunham had advanced with cautious tread. He knew how to handle the men. But the women! Ah! they were still a riddle unsolved.

Ralph Dunham smiled slightly as he glanced at the frail little bird caught in the cage beside him. Some day he would not have to be so circumspect! But now he fell back upon such small-talk as he could muster. He had seen her at the theater the night before; and they criticized the play. Fortunately it was a drama that he could discuss with her.

They had been spinning along close to the speed limit with the engine purring evenly, fairly eating up the Park road. Meanwhile, in Elizabeth Ferris' pretty head an estimate of the man beside her took shape. He was

interesting—yes; somewhat more serious-minded than most of the men she knew. But in spite of his having his life filled with mines and railroads and banks, he seemed not oblivious to the gayer side of life. That such a wizard of finance should so unbend as to spend a half-hour with a girl in a motor-car, and could actually laugh and joke with her, struck her as an amazing thing. Her previous impressions of Dunham had been based in a great measure upon the conception the cartoonists had unanimously settled upon. Those enterprising artists were fond of depicting Dunham as a grim-visaged figure, clad in mail, with the dollar-mark blazoned big upon his shield, who stood knee-deep in financial carnage and mowed his way through throngs of hapless ruined wretches.

But now she had to revise her opinion of the man. He had proved that he was not altogether the ogre that he had been represented. It is true, she was conscious of a certain quality of steely strength about Dunham; but he was far

from being the personification of brute force and savage cunning that filled the mind's eye of the public.

II

"Really, my dear, he's far from impossible," Elizabeth said to her friend Ann Jordan, as she recounted her adventure over tea and English muffins. "Different from the men we know, of course, but not at all the wild and wooly person you'd think him from reading the newspapers."

Such were Elizabeth Ferris' first impressions of a man who was to play no insignificant part in the shaping of her life.

CHAPTER IV

THE ENTERING WEDGE

I

A MONTH had elapsed since Dunham's proposal to Stephen and Margaret, and during that time the financier had paid Elizabeth marked attention. He had been present at more social functions than it had been his custom to attend. First there had been a dinner-dance given by the Ferrises, to which Dunham had been invited. He had devoted much of his time to Elizabeth upon that occasion. And following fast upon the Ferris' stamp of social approval there had descended upon Dunham a shower of invitations such as had never blessed him before. He smiled each morning as he noted the altered character of his mail. Already, he congratulated himself, his overtures were bear-

ing fruit. He had made no mistake in his estimate of the situation.

Every night found Dunham playing his new rôle of society-man. He even learned the latest dancing steps—not being the sort to stand by and look idly upon action of any kind. Furthermore, it did not suit his purpose to see Elizabeth Ferris borne off upon the arm of every empty-faced youth who knew how to move his feet in time to music.

So Dunham had plunged with characteristic vigor into the business in hand—the business of getting married. He danced with Elizabeth, and talked to her, and sent her flowers, and books, and bon-bons. And he called at the Ferris' house at every opportunity. It was not surprising that his name and Elizabeth's soon became coupled in the mouths of the gossips.

II

Margaret Ferris was not slow in hearing the stories that were being circulated—the rumors of her daughter's engagement to the wealthiest

bachelor in New York. But as yet she had said nothing to Elizabeth. It was evident that the affair must soon come to a crisis—so vigorous was Dunham's suit. Margaret was not surprised, therefore, when Elizabeth said to her one day—

"Oh, Mother! What do you think I heard to-day? It was something about Mr. Dunham and me! We're engaged—at least that's what Emily Morton told me this afternoon. She says she's heard it several times. Isn't it ridiculous?"

Mrs. Ferris smiled at her daugher's excitement.

"Ridiculous?" she repeated, as if weighing the word. "Really, Elizabeth, why not be more optimistic and say—*premature?*"

"Why, what do you mean?" Elizabeth asked in astonishment.

"Just what I say, my dear," her mother replied. "People wouldn't be saying such a thing unless there were some likelihood of its

really happening. The public, you see, always has its eyes open."

"But Mr. Dunham hasn't the least idea of marrying me, Mother, I'm sure. I hope he won't hear such an embarrassing story."

"Why do you think he hasn't any idea of proposing, Elizabeth?" Mrs. Ferris asked. "You are young, my dear. When you are older you will learn that any man may be suspected of anything!"

"Absurd, Mother! Mr. Dunham has simply been nice to me because he knows you and Father. I'm sure I'm the last girl he'd ever think of in that way."

Margaret Ferris looked at her daugher narrowly. It was hard for her to realize, sometimes, that anybody could be so unsophisticated as Elizabeth. But she could remember, though it cost her some effort, that there had been a time when she had believed that people married for love.

"Why has Dunham been so attentive to you

lately?" she asked. "Do you imagine that it is because he is so fond of your father or me that he spends so much of his time with you? My dear child—don't be ridiculous! You're surely old enough to know that when a man pays marked attention to a woman he always has some definite end in view. In your case that end, so far as Dunham is concerned, can be nothing more or less than—marriage."

Elizabeth looked at her mother in amazement. She was astounded at such a construction of Dunham's gallantries.

"How can you imagine such a thing?" she cried.

"How can you fail to know it?" her mother retorted.

"He hasn't breathed a word to me—not one syllable—that could be so construed," Elizabeth answered.

"There's plenty of time," was her mother's confident comment.

"Even if it were so—that he had any such

intention as proposing to me—of course it would be out of the question."

"How 'out of the question?'" Margaret asked calmly.

"Why—his age!" Elizabeth exclaimed. "How could I marry a man old enough to be my father?"

"It's a much wiser thing for a girl to do to marry a man older than she is than to tie herself for life to a selfish boy," Mrs. Ferris observed.

"Anyhow, I don't care for Mr. Dunham," the girl declared.

"My dear—don't be silly," her mother said. "It isn't so much a question of *caring* that should decide one nowadays, when a man proposes. It's all very well for the heroine of some romantic novel to rant about love; but we must not forget that this is a practical age. There are many things one has to consider. And most important of all is money. There's no real happiness anywhere without it—for

there's too much worry, if not actual hardship, for people who can't make both ends meet. Since you have brought up the question, I tell you these things that you ought to know. Dunham means to marry you—there's no doubt at all of his intentions."

Elizabeth turned her frightened eyes upon her mother.

"Oh, don't say that!" she begged. "He—he wouldn't ask me—unless he thought I liked him a great deal; and I've never given him any reason to think that."

"My child—your own feelings are probably the last thing he would consider. Whether you liked him, I mean. It's not the way of a man—least of all a man like Dunham—to let a proposal of marriage hinge upon the lady's attitude. It's of themselves that men think. They see something they want and they go after it. Dunham wants to marry you and it's inevitable that he will propose."

"He mustn't—oh! he mustn't do that! Can't you go to him and tell him that I don't

want to be married? Please, Mother! Tell him I didn't understand. Please don't let him ask me!"

Elizabeth was on the verge of tears now. Before her rose a mental image of Ralph Dunham —persistent, assertive, strong, and perhaps cruel. She shrank from the prospect of denying him anything. She suddenly felt weak and defenseless.

"Don't cry and make a fuss over this," Margaret said sharply. "It would make me miserable, and you too, and it wouldn't do any good at all. I want you to be happy, Elizabeth, and if you are sensible and marry Dunham I'm sure you will be. He admires you very much, and he will treat you like a queen."

"But I can't marry him, Mother! Don't you understand? He's one of the last men I know that I'd choose for a husband."

"My dear girl, you haven't any choice. When a man as rich as Dunham asks a girl to marry him there is no question of refusal or acceptance, believe me. Naturally, he is not a man

to make a very good impression at first upon so young a girl as you are. But all that would come right in a little time. Really, my dear, you're enormously lucky—quite the most fortunate girl I know of."

"Lucky!" Elizabeth repeated. "I'm sure I don't understand you at all. I don't want to marry Mr. Dunham. I—I'm not ready—to marry—anyone," she stammered. "I've never thought much about marriage, you see. It all seemed so far off, always. I thought I'd have *years* to myself, before that."

"You're a queer child," her mother told her. "Dreamy, impractical—you get those qualities from your father. He has always found it difficult to accept the world as it is, and trim his sails accordingly. I hope you're not going to disappoint me this time. Be a sensible girl. Do you know—there'll be thousands of women who will envy you? There are thousands of them who would ask nothing better on earth—or in heaven either—than to be Dunham's wife."

"I suppose they want money, don't they?" Elizabeth said.

"Hm—money, no doubt," her practical mother answered. "But you don't seem to realize that money means power. Think what you could do with such means as Dunham will provide his wife with! You're interested in charities, for instance. Now about all you can do is to take part in *tableaux* at the Plaza, or the Ritz, which somebody else organizes. Or you go over to the East Side and talk with the settlement workers. But with millions at your disposal, just think of the good you could do, my dear! You could give beds to hospitals—you could even build hospitals themselves! There's no end to the charities you could finance."

As Elizabeth listened to her mother's enthusiastic recital her color deepened and in her eyes glowed a light which had not appeared in them before during the course of their talk.

"I'd never thought of that," she said slowly. "And is that why so many other girls would be so glad to marry Mr. Dunham?"

"Some of them,—yes, no doubt," her mother said, with a shrewd look at her. "Others would have an eye to the things they could do for themselves. They would think of the clothes they could buy, and the motor-cars they could ride about in, and the jewels they would have. And those things are all very well in their way, too, you know. But of course they're not the big ends that an unselfish woman would have in mind."

Elizabeth's face wore a puzzled look as she pondered over her mother's words.

"There's one thing I don't understand," she said after a time. "How could a girl—a thoroughly nice girl—make up her mind to live with a man whom she didn't really love? She might respect him—and he might be very good to her—but if there were no—no other feelings between them—if she were not passionately in love with him, how could she ever reconcile herself to bearing him children? I'm sure I should never want to give a child to a man I did not love. It would be an unnatural thing.

I should hate such a child, I'm afraid. Oh, Mother! It all seems so wicked! It all frightens me. I don't know what to think."

Margaret Ferris bit her lip with vexation. She had been congratulating herself on the way she had managed the difficult situation. That idea of Dunham's wife devoting his fortune to charitable works had been a positive stroke of genius, she told herself. It had a visible effect upon Elizabeth's attitude. And then the girl had veered off and there they were, face to face with another barrier, in the shape of an obstacle that was by no means easy to surmount. But Mrs. Ferris rose to her task.

"Dear child," she began, in the most propitiatory and confidential of tones, "this question of children is one that frightens every young bride. It's quite the most natural thing in the world that it should, too. But you see, things have changed tremendously even in our day. Fifty or a hundred years ago the family that didn't have a dozen children was the exception to the rule. Now the family with more

than one or two is the exception. And many, many married women never have any children at all. Race suicide? Nonsense! I'm speaking of the upper classes, you know. That's where the poor really help us. *They* still have large families. They can't be dissuaded, it seems. And so we more conservative mortals have to turn to and provide for their progeny. We build children's homes, and children's hospitals, free schools and playgrounds. It's only fair—after all—that we should do that much, when they relieve us of the necessity of supplying a population for the earth.

"So don't trouble your little head about that sort of thing. Dunham would defer to you, I know. You see, a man like him hasn't his heart set on founding a line. It's all different now from what it was in the old days when a man had lands, castles, and such things to hand down to posterity. Then he wanted to keep his property intact—it was a sort of monument to him. But what sentiment can anyone have in bequeathing railroad stocks to his children?

He knows well enough that after he's dead his securities will soon find their way into the market again, and that ten, or even five years after his demise there'll be very little to remind anybody that there ever was such a person. Besides, every rich man knows that a rich man's son is never any good. So they don't bother much about having any nowadays. And then, too, men like Dunham are too busy monopolizing the earth to think much about anything else."

With a laugh Margaret forthwith dismissed the subject as one definitely settled and Elizabeth asked her no more questions—at least upon that topic. But the girl still pondered over the amazing situation that confronted her.

"Why should he want to marry me?" she questioned. "I'm sure he can't love me—he hardly knows me! You must be mistaken, Mother dear."

"Don't be silly," Margaret said. "How long do you suppose it takes a man of decision to make up his mind whether he wants to marry

a certain person? No doubt Dunham was immensely taken by you the first time he laid eyes on you. You're really a very pretty girl, Elizabeth. And I dare say you can believe in love at first sight? Although it's long since out of fashion, it's just what one might expect from a person of Dunham's origin. I'm afraid he's an unfashionable man; so why be surprised if his affections exercise themselves in an unfashionable way? Come! come! Don't worry because someone's in love with you. That's the nicest part of the whole affair—the fact that the man is genuinely fond of you."

"But when I'm not fond of him, how can I marry him? It wouldn't be fair. I'd be a liar! A cheat! I'd hate myself." Elizabeth was most unhappy.

But her mother was indefatigable.

"Nonsense!" she cried. "You don't understand yourself. You don't understand Dunham. You've looked on him as a *personage* instead of as a flesh-and-blood man. He's quite human—and you'd find him very kind and gen-

erous, I know—and there's not the slightest doubt that you'd soon become very fond of him. Indeed, it's quite as well to have a husband who's a good bit daffy about you—you know they say there's no such thing as a husband and wife caring for each other in just the same degree. And you can understand how unhappy you would be if you married someone you were desperately in love with but who was more or less indifferent to you. Yes—you're a very fortunate girl, Elizabeth. You ought to be ideally happy, I'm sure."

III

In spite of her mother's attempt to mold her mind into such shape as would cause her complacently to regard Dunham in the light of a suitor, Elizabeth remained far from convinced. Her mother's arguments gradually lost their force as the days went by and she came little by little to look upon Margaret's theories as mere whims.

Elizabeth knew that her mother's wishes

sometimes bordered upon obsessions and she assured herself that Ralph Dunham's intention of proposing to her existed solely in her mother's mind.

So at last she breathed easily again and forgot the lowering cloud which for a time had hung over her and dimmed her usual optimistic girlish vision of the world.

CHAPTER V

THREATENING CLOUDS

I

At the first signs of summer the Ferrises closed their townhouse and migrated to Oak Ledge, their country-place in the Berkshires.

It was Sunday morning, and the guests were sleeping. Margaret too, as was her habit, was still in bed, giving nature the opportunity to do for her what could not be trusted solely to her French maid. There had been a time when, in spite of hours of massage, her face had revealed an increasing number of disconcerting wrinkles—the tiny witnesses to her anxiety over the family's finances. Though she had religiously spent as many hours in bed as ever, her sleep had been but fitful. But since Dunham's overtures Margaret's hopes had buoyed her up. The result was already apparent in

her returning color and the freshness of her skin.

Elizabeth, waking early, had looked out upon the gold-flooded sweep of fields and decided that the prospect was too tempting to miss. She dressed hurriedly and went down to the breakfast-room where she found her father just about to seat himself to a solitary meal.

Stephen Ferris was conscious of a guilty qualm as his daughter kissed him on both cheeks. He observed her glowing face and sparkling eyes. Hers were the joyous spirits with which youth is blessed. She was beautiful—his daughter. He did not wonder that Dunham had found her desirable. And he was all the more doubtful, as he looked at her across the table, of the merits of the cause in which he had enlisted.

Ferris said little during the meal. While Elizabeth chattered throughout the breakfast her father's thoughts turned upon the unpleasant task that lay before him—the disagreeable duty of discussing Dunham's eligibility with

the girl. He had shirked the obligation as long as Margaret would permit. The time had come when he knew that he must speak. But it was characteristic of him that he still postponed broaching the subject. Somehow it was difficult to find an opening.

II

"Will you come for a walk?" he asked Elizabeth, when having finished their breakfast they stepped out upon the broad piazza.

"Yes, indeed!" she said gladly. And taking a hat and stick from the hall he rejoined her quickly. Through the blossoming meadows they made their way, to a distant hill covered with swaying conifers and carpeted thick with a blanket of pine needles.

Watch as he would, Ferris could discover no turn of their rambling talk that came with gunshot of the topic which was uppermost in his mind. So at last he spurred himself on and took the leap.

"Elizabeth!" he said, all at once. "You

have grown up. It's hard for me to realize the fact—but it's true nevertheless."

She looked at him brightly and gave his arm a squeeze as she answered—

"I'm a big girl, you mean, Daddy—but your little daughter just the same."

"Yes, dear," he said. "And I've been awfully glad to have you, and thankful, too. But the hard part of it all is—that I can't always keep you. You'll be getting married some day and then you won't be walking through the fields with me any more."

She laughed at his seriousness.

"Don't be gloomy over that prospect," she replied. "I'm a new woman. Nowadays girls don't look forward to being married as the sole aim of their existence. Marriage is something mercifully provided for women who can't do anything else with their lives. There's too much for women to do in this age,—oh! social work—votes for women—the improvement of the condition of the poor—too many things of that sort crying for our attention."

Improving the condition of the poor! Ferris winced at the unintended irony of the remark. If Elizabeth married Dunham she would certainly be improving the condition of the poor. He thought with a shudder of his bank balance. Yet he wished that Margaret had not insisted on his having a talk with their daughter. Margaret was not the kind to suffer any conscientious twinges. He was too sensitive perhaps, as his wife was forever telling him.

He looked at Elizabeth curiously. And he was glad that she could not read his thoughts.

"My dear—this modern-woman stuff is all right for unattractive girls who haven't any chance of being married. It's a very good thing for girls from obscure families—gives them a chance to do something besides marrying some poor clerk and settling down to a humdrum life of bringing up babies and trying to make both ends of a scanty salary meet. But your position is quite different. It's inevitable that you should marry."

Elizabeth laughed again.

"What a dear, old-fashioned person you are!" she cried. "You're hopelessly behind the times."

Ferris smiled at her cajolery.

"Perhaps!" he admitted. "But there are other men—younger than I am, too—who are just as old-fashioned. There's someone right in our house now who doesn't think you ought to devote yourself to a career of suffrage, or socialism, or any other of those queer fads."

"Oh! Mother! Yes, of couse. I know her heart's set on making a social butterfly of me."

"No—I wasn't thinking of your mother. It's a man—a certain man who would like to marry you."

She could see that his hands were trembling violently as he continued quickly—

"Elizabeth, I want to talk to you. You're twenty now, aren't you?"

She was frightened by the look on his face, but she said that she would be twenty in nine weeks.

"Well," he said, "you are old enough to be married."

She nearly screamed; and when she had had time to get her breath she told him that she did not want to be married at all for a long time. Ferris seemed impatient and cut her short.

"Your mother married me when she was only a few weeks over eighteen," he said. "And I think early marriages are the happiest. I want you to think about it."

She had been congratulating herself that her mother had forgotten all about her ambition for marrying her off to Ralph Dunham. But her father's abrupt broaching of the subject of marriage made her suspect at once that her mother had been urging her ideas upon him. Neither of them spoke for a time; and then a thought came into Elizabeth's head and she asked wickedly—

"Father, has Jack been speaking to you?"

"Jack? Jack who?" said he.

"Oh, Papa! Jack Fleming of course," she

answered. Jack Fleming was a sort of distant cousin of hers who happened to be staying at Oak Ledge. There was no more sentiment between him and Elizabeth than between brother and sister. She was teasing her father deliberately and she did not dare to look at him just then for she knew that he was angry.

"Jack Fleming! Why, he hasn't a penny!" he said quickly.

"He likes me, I think," Elizabeth said in a very low voice.

"My child, what is the good of his liking you, or any girl? The chief thing—the only thing you must have if you want to get married—is money—lots of money."

She was startled. Quite suddenly she looked up and said:

"What is it, Papa?"

He answered without looking at her:

"Dunham wants to marry you. He is one of the richest men in New York."

Elizabeth nearly screamed.

"Wants to!" she said. "Perhaps, but I'm not willing. And I should think you're not willing either."

He looked at her quickly, and she could see that he was nervous.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

She was daring now, and bold. She turned and looked him full in the face:

"You wouldn't want me to marry him, would you?"

"Why not?"

Elizabeth was shocked. It seemed to her that the reasons were plain: Dunham was old, he was not handsome or charming, and somehow she was sure that he did not belong to the same sort of people as her father and mother and her friends. And now that the horrid suggestion about marrying him was put into her head again she found out quite suddenly that she didn't like him at all.

But to have to answer her father's question, put in such a tone, too, was dreadful. She felt as if she were choking.

"He is much older than I am," she said in a whisper.

"Yes, yes; I know that. But if you could like him—he would be generous to you, and he would be kind to you, I think," said Ferris.

She shook her head.

"I couldn't, I couldn't, I couldn't!" she gasped out.

Stephen Ferris's face looked dreadfully white, and it cut Elizabeth to the heart to think she was disappointing him. But he patted her on the shoulder and said:

"All right, my dear. You must do as you like, of course. But if you were a little older, and I could talk to you better—"

He broke off suddenly, and patting her shoulder again, ended with a nod and a smile, and again said, "All right, my dear."

Then he turned away and said:

"Well, let's get back to the house. They will be down by this time."

And then there came upon her the strangest feeling she had ever had yet. Though he was

so sweet and so kind, and though he turned away as if the dreadful thing he had spoken about was dropped altogether, Elizabeth had, just for a moment, a feeling as if she suddenly had found her hands and feet tied up so that she could not move. And a horrible feeling came over her that something was hanging over her from which she could not escape.

CHAPTER VI

THE BARGAIN

I

Throughout the weeks that followed, Elizabeth and Dunham often met. A succession of week-end yatching- and house-parties usually found the two the guests of the same host. And Dunham's attentions were more and more openly directed to Elizabeth, while her mother seized every opportunity to convince her of Dunham's desirability as a husband.

It was at the Ramsays' country place on Long Island that Dunham asked her to marry him. The polo cup-matches were being played at Meadow Brook and every house for miles around was crowded with people. Upon the eventful night, which Elizabeth was destined to remember long, Dunham had suggested to her a stroll upon the beach. It was warm and the

moon was approaching the full. Upon the broad piazzas enthusiastic groups were discussing the day's play, while the more energetic members of the house-party were dancing to the lively strains of a graphophone.

Elizabeth heard Dunham's invitation with dismay. She had studiously avoided being left alone with her admirer. But she could think of no plausible excuse then; and soon they were walking through the garden, down the path which led to the bay.

Almost fearfully Elizabeth peered through the midsummer gloaming at her companion, as if she would discern at once, without further suspense, if his purpose were what she had long dreaded. Was it come at last—the crisis that she feared?

What she saw, in the half-light, was a man of good height, with broad shoulders and a strongly knit frame. He had a resolute face, and short, thick, wavy brown hair; a pair of quick, gray eyes, black-lashed and deeply-set under somewhat bushy brows; firm lips, a trifle

thin; a massive jowl, and a clear, colorless skin —not by any means a "beauty man," but a man whose face had the power to attract as well as to repel.

II

Along the beach, upon the hard sand close to the water's edge, they walked. And Dunham, to his great astonishment, found it difficult to put his thoughts into words. But at last he broke the silence which had fallen upon them—a quiet which was only the more marked by the occasional wash of the ebbing tide.

"Miss Ferris," he said suddenly, "I asked you to come down here on the shore, away from the others, because I have something to say to you—and I couldn't say it except when we were alone." And straightway, drawing a deep breath, he plunged into his declaration. "The very first time I saw you I thought you were lovely—and since I have known you better my first impression has only become confirmed. I don't mean that I had any doubt—

from the beginning—upon the subject; but the time's past when a man can carry a damsel off on his charger without any preliminaries. Nowadays the lady's own wishes have to be consulted. I don't know how you regard me —I haven't the slightest idea whether you find my society even endurable. You see, all young women like you are so well-mannered that a man like myself never knows what they think or feel. But I can assure you that there's no doubt in my mind as to my attitude toward you. I want you to do me the great honor of becoming my wife. I can say honestly that I never wanted or asked any other woman to marry me. That I'm doing so now is as much a surprise to me, in a way, as it may be to you, for I never thought—somehow—that I should find a girl who appealed to me as you do. Never imagined that I'd meet any woman who would attract me so much that I'd want to live with her. This may all sound queer to you— but what I'm trying to do is to tell you how I feel toward you. I suppose most people would

call it love. I don't know what it is. I'm not a man who has been given to self-analysis. Haven't had the time nor the inclination. It's those moody writer chaps who can pick a passion to pieces. All my life I've simply wanted things and then tried to get them. Now I want you. And if you can say 'Yes,' I promise never to cause you, knowingly, any regret for marrying me. Your life, your happiness, your honor,—I'll do my best to cherish them."

As Dunham finished, he came to a halt upon the beach. Elizabeth paused, too, and they faced each other silently for one brief, tense moment. A lump in her throat was choking her. Her eyes sought his almost piteously as they blazed at her under his heavy eyebrows. Even Elizabeth, as well as Dunham, knew that he was strangely moved. He held himself rigid under a sudden strain of unexpected suspense and the knotted veins swelled on his broad forehead. As he watched her he saw that she grew pale and shuddered.

And still she said nothing.

"You—you seem frightened," he told her. "Please don't be afraid of me. Don't feel that this is something you can't escape from, if you wish. I'd be the last person in the world to try to induce you to do something you didn't want to do."

"I—I believe you," she said, finding her voice at last. "I am sure of it. For I know you're too big a man to be willing to take advantage of a woman. Before I can give you an answer," she went on hurriedly, "I too must tell you something of my own feelings. You see—I want to be honest with you. I couldn't bear ever to have you think—later—that I deceived you, that I misled you in any way."

"Impossible!" Dunham exclaimed, in a tone of relief. So he had a chance! He even wondered why he had—for a moment—doubted the outcome. He never asked more than a chance. Granted that, for him success in any undertaking was an assured thing. "Of course you wouldn't deceive me—you couldn't, Miss Fer-

ris. It's not in you. But what is it that you have on your mind?" he asked her.

She breathed quickly in her agitation and clasped her slender hands nervously. Dunham's searching eyes disconcerted her.

"If—if I should marry you," she said haltingly, "would you be willing to give me—oh! it's hard to put it into words—to give me a great deal of freedom? More freedom than many women might ask?"

"My dear lady," Dunham answered, "your happiness would be my chief concern. This freedom that you speak of—if it's essential to your well-being—ought not to be a difficult thing for your husband to provide; unless, of course, he merely married to secure a housekeeper—and I reckon I can provide you with plenty of servants. So I don't believe you'd find yourself hampered. You ought to be much freer than you've ever been. A married woman can do just about as she pleases, you know."

Elizabeth's bosom rose and fell with her la-

bored breathing. Even in the moonlight her face and neck darkened over the unwonted rush of blood that coursed up to her temples.

"Perhaps you don't quite understand," she said. "It is very hard to explain. What I mean is this: I'm not very old; and I've never really faced the question of marriage before. And it frightens me. There's so much about it that's a sealed book to me. I believe that you would be kind to me—but whether I married you would depend upon what you expected of me. It may seem to you very unfair, but I couldn't give everything to you—nor to any man I have ever met. I—I don't know how much you'd expect—how much you would ask of me." She had avoided his eyes, as she spoke; but now she looked him full in the face. "I couldn't give what perhaps you would feel you must have . . . children—they—they're simply out of the question." She looked up at him fearfully for a moment, and then quickly turned her head. "That's what I mean. Perhaps sometime I might feel differently about it.

But—it frightens me now. And I can't promise that I'd ever change. I had to tell you—and you don't have to marry me, now that you know."

Dunham considered the matter rapidly. Her fears he set down as the natural shrinking of a girl who was herself little more than a child. She was hardly mature, mentally—as was not uncommon among the children of the rich. He knew that the wits of the poor quicken early under the struggle for existence. Children? He had not given a serious thought to that phase of his marriage. Vaguely he had seen himself—perhaps two decades off—with younger people in his house. But Dunham's imagination concerned itself habitually with things of the present. A year, or two, or five—ten at the most—stretching away into the future, gave him vista enough for his plans. His world moved too fast to anticipate too much. Modern industrialism is an ever-shifting thing. Men build up only to tear down again, and begin their labor anew upon a

vaster scale. A river is diverted from its course to make fertile some barren waste; or a tunnel is dug, to give access to some isolated spot; continents are separated and the physical map of the world is changed. And amid all this constant alteration he is the genius who can adapt his plans to new conditions—who can suddenly marshal his forces in the battle of commercialism and by an unexpected change of front turn defeat into victory.

Children had not entered Ralph Dunham's scheme of life.

Surely, he thought, this girl's reluctance is quite to be expected. Probably it is the usual attitude of carefully sheltered young women from whose eyes the sterner facts of existence have been hidden. Dunham knew that there were countless homes in New York, as in every great city,—homes consisting each of only one room, in which the wonderful mysteries of life and death were constantly being enacted in the presence of old and young alike. But he likewise knew—or thought he did—of the igno-

rance in which the wealthy rear their girls and boys.

"I understand," he said thoughtfully. "You are very honest with me, and I appreciate it. And so far as this question of freedom is concerned, put your mind at rest, please. It's *you,* I've been thinking of. It's *you* I'm asking for; and having won you—as I hope to —do you suppose I'd have the heart to make you unhappy? No, my dear child; you've nothing to fear, believe me. . . . And you'll say 'Yes?' " he asked her.

"You—you understand?" She put the question timidly. "Why I make this reservation? It is because I am not sure of myself—yet. Perhaps I ought not to marry you. It may be a wicked thing for me to do; for I'm afraid I don't know what it means to love a man absolutely. It may be that I am different from other girls. I only know that I am as I am. And if you still want me, then I will—marry you."

Dunham laid his hand quickly upon her arm.

Her naïveté had given an odd zest to the occasion, which it would have lacked with a girl of a commonplace nature and conventional ideas.

But she stepped back at once, as if his action had frightened her.

Dunham was piqued, amused, vexed, and interested all in one moment. He felt that she was absolutely delicious in her disregard of the extraordinary prize that he offered in the matrimonial market. He realized that there was a tantalizing fascination about her; that her lips looked fresh and fragrant and inviting in the moonlight. It thrilled him—the thought that he had triumphed. And it cost him much not to take her up in his arms and crush her to his heart with masterful kisses.

But he knew that the time for love-making was not then.

CHAPTER VII

GIVING AND TAKING

I

So Elizabeth was engaged to Dunham! The news caused much secret rejoicing in the Ferris household. The solution of the family's financial difficulties lifted a great weight from the shoulders of Margaret and Stephen. They had been like condemned prisoners, anxiously awaiting a pardon which they hardly dared hope would arrive in time.

Elizabeth had returned home two days after that evening when she and Dunham had made their bargain upon the shore of the Sound. When she told her father and mother what had happened they had had much difficulty in hiding their triumphant joy. And Margaret kissed and patted her daughter with an unaccustomed warmth.

"You seem very glad, Mother," Elizabeth said, glowing beneath the caresses which had been sadly lacking throughout her childhood.

"Of course I am, dearie," Margaret Ferris said. "You have proved yourself a sensible girl. And now your future is assured. You're going to be married to a good man who not only wants to take the best of care of you, and give you everything, but he has the means to do it. Taking the will for the deed is all very well in theory; but in every-day life it's a pretty unsatisfactory substitute for the real thing. Many, many young brides find out the truth of the matter very quickly. They marry young men who would be only too glad to buy them everything they could wish for; but not having any money they can only provide love in a cottage, with the traditional bread and cheese and kisses. Girls who have been well brought up, as you have, accustomed to having every luxury, are bound to find such an existence very palling after its novelty has worn off. That's why we are so glad! We know

that you'll be well taken care of and I'm sure you're going to be very happy." And Mrs. Ferris kissed her child again, beaming upon her the while as though it were—and indeed it was—one of the happiest moments of her life.

Stephen, as was usual with him, had less to say than his wife. But he gave Elizabeth a paternal peck upon her cheek and nodded his approval of Margaret's remarks. He knew better than to attempt to gloss over the situation. He had always been inept at any business requiring subterfuge—though he had never known his shortcomings in that respect until his marriage. Living with Margaret had opened his eyes to a realization of how intricate and complex a matter life really is. Looking upon a woman's daily maneuvers from behind the scenes, so to speak, had taught him that he was ill equipped by temperament, training, and even mentality, to skirmish his way unaided through the world. And until he found himself confronted by poverty he had

fervently congratulated himself that his family had provided so well for his wants.

The fact that Stephen Ferris was so entirely aware of his own defects made his present sense of relief all the keener. He devoutly thanked God for his timely escape from the ruin which had menaced him so threateningly.

"When are you going to be married, Elizabeth?" the practical Margaret asked as soon as the first felicitations were finished.

"Ralph wants the wedding this Fall—in about two months," Elizabeth answered. "Do you think I could be ready so soon?"

Ready! Margaret laughed out of sheer joy. And she told herself mentally that she would have undertaken to have Elizabeth's trousseau complete in two weeks' time had it been necessary. She knew how the tradespeople would tumble over one another in their eagerness to fit out Ralph Dunham's wife. But Elizabeth guessed nothing of the thoughts that were flashing through her mother's mind.

"I don't think that's too soon, dear," Mar-

garet told her. "Of course there'll be a great deal to do. But we'll begin at once and I'm sure there'll be no trouble in having a very nice trousseau ready in that time."

Elizabeth, it must be confessed, seemed less eager than her mother at the prospect of an early Fall wedding.

"But I'm not sure I want to be married so soon," she objected. "You see, it's all rather unexpected and I feel as if I needed some time to accustom myself to—to the idea of being married. After all, why should I have to hurry? I shall be married for the rest of my life—and I haven't been out long, and I think I'd like to go about a few months longer just as —as a girl, you know."

Her mother laughed.

"I know perfectly well how you feel," she exclaimed. "You rather dread the prospect of being married. All young girls are reluctant to take the final step. But you'd find, I'm sure, that you'd feel no different if you waited a year. So why postpone the inevitable? I

really think, too, that you ought to consider Ralph. Men like him, who are just old enough to realize, after being wrapped up in business for years, that they should have been married long ago, don't like to wait, once they have found a girl they like. They want to be married with just as little delay as possible. So I think you should just make up your mind to follow Ralph's wishes. We'll announce your engagement—oh! in about a fortnight—and once you have grown accustomed to having people know all about it your engagement won't seem half so odd as it does now."

So the thing was settled. Margaret's wishes prevailed, though now and then Elizabeth was inclined to protest against being hurried. But her mother was determined to bring matters to a speedy termination. Their need of money was too pressing for her to be willing to countenance any delay. And moreover she wanted to see Elizabeth safely married to Dunham. She knew that she would not be able to draw a comfortable breath until the wedding had ac-

tually taken place. Any delay, more than was necessary to an observance of ordinary social usage, she objected to vigorously. Who knew what might happen? Every paper one picked up contained news of automobile accidents, and shipwrecks, and railroad collisions. No! She did not intend to see the prize snatched away from under her very nose.

So Elizabeth gradually became resigned to the prospect.

II

There was much to be done in the ensuing weeks. Margaret took up with energy the numerous duties that devolved upon her. Her capable brain planned everything—in the large and down to the smallest detail. And it was characteristic of her relations with Stephen that she was the one—and not he—who not only proclaimed the necessity of a definite adjustment of Dunham's promises to them, but also effected the settlement.

Stephen displayed a distinct aversion to ap-

proaching Dunham on the subject of the money Dunham had agreed to pay for the wife he was buying. His reluctance to broach the subject to his future son-in-law was quite in keeping with his usual methods of transacting business affairs. And Margaret soon gave up in disgust her attempt to urge Stephen to some definite action.

"Don't hurry him," he had said. "Dunham's all right. He's square. He'll do just as he promised."

"Of course—I know that he will," she had answered testily. "That's not the point, Steve. And I know, as you say, that we can manage to get along without the money until the wedding. But don't you see that it's *safer* to get it now and *have* it? No one knows what might happen. Some terrible thing might occur to prevent their being married at all. Then where would we be?"

"Nothing's likely to happen," he had said.

"But what harm can there be in going to Dunham now? He'd never miss the money."

Stephen shook his head.

"I don't like to ask him to pay up," he had told her. "He'll come around and settle of his own accord. He may do it any day now." And that was all the satisfaction she could get from her liege lord.

So Margaret went to Dunham herself. And as a result of her skillful moves, upon a day appointed for the occasion Dunham and his lawyer came to the Ferris' house, where Margaret and Stephen, together with Craig Clifton, their own lawyer, waited in a fever of expectancy.

Craig Clifton was a young man, not yet thirty. He had been the junior partner in the law firm of Van Tyn and Clifton, and with the death of the senior member had inherited the Ferrises among other clients whom Van Tyn had advised for years.

Clifton had shown no surprise when Stephen outlined to him the terms of the transaction. Even in the few years of his practice of law he had come across too many curious marriage settlements to be astonished by his client's in-

formation. The only unusual feature of the affair was the size of the payment to be made—a circumstance the contemplation of which was very pleasing to Clifton, since his fee would be based upon the amount of money involved.

He did not share the nervousness of Elizabeth's father and mother as they waited in Ferris' study. And since both Margaret's and Stephen's thoughts were too much occupied by the approaching realization of long weeks of hoping—if not of prayers—Clifton sat there calmly deliberating in his mind as to how large a fee his clients would pay without protesting. Ferris, he knew, would be more than reasonable. But he reflected that women were more difficult—especially a woman of Mrs. Ferris' type, who looked upon bills of any sort (no matter how legitimate) as something bordering upon imposition, if not actual insult.

At last Dunham and his lawyer arrived. The great man, trusting to his attorney, took little part in the conversation. Nor indeed did the matter require much discussion. The point

which Margaret had feared might be raised—an unwillingness on Dunham's part to relinquish all hold upon the money until the marriage should have been effected—was not brought up at all. Dunham's lawyer had spoken to his client upon that feature and had been directed to deliver the funds unconditionally. He was willing to risk any danger of the marriage's failing to take place. As for the possible demise of one of the parties prior to the event, Elizabeth seemed to him most unlikely to die; and he had said to the legal light: "If I should die they might as well have the money as anyone else. It would be of no use to me, you know," he had added grimly.

III

So it was settled. At last Margaret and Stephen saw before them the proceeds of the bartering of their child. They had been wise in their day and generation. What they had had to sell they had disposed of to the highest bidder—the first, to be sure, but to the highest,

there was no doubt. Yes! like thousands of other aristocrats they had sold their daughter in the markets of the world.

Upon two small slips of paper was the tragic story written. Margaret clutched hers fiercely, as if she would never let it go. She had held it tightly, even when bidding Dunham good-by. And after he had gone her fingers still closed upon the check in a vise-like grip, as a miser's hand grasps his gold in the presence of another.

But Stephen had not picked up his share of the treasure-trove. The magic strip of pink paper which he had accepted in exchange for his own flesh and blood still lay upon the table in front of him. He looked down at it curiously. He had suddenly conceived an aversion to touching it. For the first time he saw the transaction in a clear light. The check seemed polluted—something unclean that he dreaded to come in contact with. For a moment he was tempted to rush after Dunham; to call him back; to tell him that the whole affair was mon-

strous; that it must not be. But one look at his wife, with her flushed face and a steely glitter in her eyes, convinced him of the absurdity of such an act. The thing was done. It was irrevocable. They had accepted the terms; the money had been paid. And now all was over—all except the part Elizabeth was to play in the affair. For it was Elizabeth who must suffer—pretty, innocent Elizabeth. He shuddered as he realized what he had done and he wondered for an instant whether God would forgive him.

IV

Craig Clifton rose and bade Mrs. Ferris good-by. Stephen, conscious of a sudden desire to quit the room—to escape from the scene of the hateful transaction—left Margaret and accompanied the lawyer on his way out of the house.

Clifton was feeling very well pleased with his morning's work. It was, to be sure, something of a breach of legal etiquette to negotiate any

business at a client's house. But the charge he intended making on account of his services would more than indemnify him for any possible loss of dignity.

As they went down the stairs the butler opened the front door to admit a young girl who entered quickly and waited until they should descend the remaining steps.

When she kissed Ferris, Clifton knew that it was Elizabeth.

"Mr. Clifton—my daughter," his client said. They shook hands—Elizabeth and the young lawyer—and the realization came over Clifton with a sudden shock that he had just taken part in a very reprehensible affair. He felt terribly guilty under the cordial greeting of the fresh-faced girl.

It struck Elizabeth, in the brief time that they stood there, that both her father and Mr. Clifton looked at her in a most curious way—her father out of the corners of his eyes, as if he did not want to be seen looking, and his companion in a very odd way, as if he pitied her.

His face was very grave, she thought, and yet there was a kindness, a tenderness, a friendliness in both his voice and his manner which made her feel instinctively that she liked him. She wondered how old he was.

As he looked upon her delicate, flower-like youth and reflected how her beauty had been bartered in the room above Clifton was sensible of overwhelming shame. And his heart went out to her as to a child whom some dreadful peril threatened.

It was only for a moment that Clifton saw her, but she occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else as he went back to his down town office. As for a fee for his part in the contemptible business, the mere thought of such a thing nauseated him. Faugh! Blood-money! that was what it would be. He would have none of it.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CLOSED DOOR

I

THE last of the wedding guests had gone. Stephen Ferris gave a great sigh of relief as he entered his bed-room, and fervently thanked God that the pious business was finished. Yes! it was all over! He could breathe again. There would be no more unpleasant interviews with insistent creditors—no more importuning letters from impatient tradesmen—and (best of all) no more harrowing scenes with Margaret!

Why should he care what people thought? He had detected a touch of irony in many of the honied speeches that had fallen upon his ears that night. And one of the "yellows" had been quite outspoken in its comments upon the marriage, insinuating only too plainly that having bought boards of directors and judges and leg-

islatures, Dunham was at last buying himself a wife. Ferris smiled grimly as he recalled the tell-tale faces of some of his guests. He knew well enough that many of the fond mammas were carrying bleeding hearts home with them, for the match-making instinct of matrons with marriageable daughters is too deeply implanted not to plunge its owners often into a hell of jealousy.

He could hear his wife moving about in her room. Margaret had been radiant that night. It was years since Stephen had seen her appear to such advantage. She had cast off almost miraculously the burdensome shroud of worry that had enveloped her for so many months, and had beamed upon all comers alike with a countenance that seemed never to have worn a frown of perplexity. Ferris knocked at the door that joined and yet separated their rooms; and upon hearing her answering "Come!" he entered.

Margaret had not begun to undress. She was standing before her pier-glass, gazing at her reflection with no little satisfaction. The news

of Elizabeth's engagement to Dunham had immediately changed the temper of the Fifth Avenue costumers. A flood of engraved announcements had invited Margaret to see the latest Paris models, imported by *mesdames* with Irish surnames, and French gentlemen—Henris and Georges and Raouls—with no surnames at all. And Margaret had graciously permitted a few —the fortunate ones—to practice their arts upon her matronly figure. Round her neck hung a rope of pearls,—a recent acquisition. It was the gift of the groom—an unconventional offering—to his future mother-in-law. Dunham,—with the uncanny foresight which invariably characterized his moves, and had helped him mightily to make his way in the world—had divined that he had best make Margaret Ferris his friend. The money consideration, he realized, was purely a business matter. But jewels bestowed upon a woman—ah! there was some sentiment attached to such an act. It was easy to see that Ferris was weaker than his wife. She dominated him. And Dunham con-

sidered it politic to ally himself with the stronger faction. That was usually his way. Who knew but that some day his house might be divided?

"Well! it's done!" Stephen said slowly, as he dropped into a seat.

"Yes," she rejoined, still viewing herself in the mirror, turning now this way and now that, in preening, peacock fashion. "Yes—but why so mournful, Steve? One would imagine that you had just come from a funeral. I should think you had as good reason to feel cheerful as a man ever had in this world of sin and creditors."

"Oh, well!" Steve answered testily, "I'm glad enough to be safely off the rocks, with plain sailing ahead. But now that it's all over and Elizabeth's gone I can't help wondering. . . ." He paused, and in the interval his wife turned quickly and looked at him for the first time since he had entered her bed-room.

"Wondering . . . what?" she inquired with asperity.

"Oh! just what it's all going to mean for her. If she had married some chap of her own age, —young Jessup, or Tom Waring's boy, for instance—someone she was in love with, I'd feel a lot easier about her."

Margaret's hands ceased toying with her pearls. She moved nearer her husband and peered at him intently as he sat there with bowed head.

"Well! you are a sentimental old fool, Steve," she said. "I didn't think it of you. You'll be sending Dunham's money back to him next, I suppose."

"Good God! but you're hard, Margaret. I don't believe you care a rap whether Elizabeth's happy or not."

Margaret laughed.

"Don't be silly, Steve," she said. "Of course I care. But why shouldn't she be happy? She's a lucky girl. There isn't anything that she can't have. She need never worry about money as long as she lives. And Dunham will be good to her. He's generous,

Steve." And she looked down at her necklace. "See what he did for me! Any man who would remember his wife's family so handsomely won't stint his own."

"Look here, Margaret! Money isn't everything. It's all very well in its way; but it won't buy happiness."

Margaret Ferris shrugged her shoulders as she turned again to the pier-glass.

"Your early training again, Steve! You've told me that your grandfather used to talk to you about honor, and business integrity and all that sort of thing—as if they were all that was worth while. But he never said anything about money! I tell you, money is power! Nobody can accomplish anything without it. There were some things your grandfather didn't know. If he were alive I could teach him—well, if not how to suck eggs, at least a few truths that would make him open his eyes!"

"I dare say," Stephen answered drily. "And since, as you imply, my early education was so faulty, I'm afraid we shall never agree upon

some points. We'll never see things alike. All I can say is that I hope we'll never have cause to regret this affair. . . . Good-night!"

"Good-night, Steve! And for goodness' sake, cheer up! You'll live to bless the day Ralph Dunham came to us."

II

It was a two-hour run from the Ferris' country place to the Marwood Inn. Dunham's big French car had whisked the bride and groom away in the moonlight, leaving the guests to linger and make merry at their leisure. Neither Elizabeth nor her husband felt at ease. It was hard for them both to realize that they were actually married. Rushing along the country roads, with the soft nightwind against their faces, they spoke but little. Dunham took her hand in his and stroked it softly. There had been no love-making during their brief engagement; and now there was a vague something in his wife's attitude that kept Dunham from slipping his arm about her and drawing her close

to him. He wanted to feel her young, supple body against him, and he longed to breathe in the freshness of her smooth skin. But he could wait. He had waited for many things in life.

It was midnight when the car came to a halt in front of the hotel and Dunham helped his bride out of the tonneau. The moon was still high and from their vantage point on the bluff they looked down upon the lake as it reached away to the north, flanked upon both sides by mountains which rose sheer and rugged from the wave-lapped shores. Dunham's pulse quickened as he took in the prospect. He felt strangely young again.

"It's beautiful—isn't it, dear?" he said.

"Like fairy-land!" Elizabeth answered. She too was entranced by the picture. The setting was all the most imaginative maiden could have dreamed of for her honeymoon.

Her honeymoon! Ah! yes. She was in fairyland—but where was the fairy-prince? Was that he by her side—that bulky figure, swathed in the loose great-coat which flapped

unromantically in the cool breeze that swept chillingly from the lake? Did some such question enter her mind as they stood there during that short space? At all events, Elizabeth looked at her husband; and as she looked she shivered slightly. Dunham noticed the involuntary shudder.

"Come! You're cold!" he exclaimed, kindly enough. "Let's go inside."

"Oh! it's nothing," she told him hastily, as they turned toward the inn. It was not the sharp wind that had caused the brief tremor, for she was warmly wrapped. But in spite of herself she had suddenly felt a touch of nervousness. Of course, she and Dunham understood each other perfectly. And she trusted him. He had been very kind. But what girl would not experience at least some faint qualm of uneasiness at such a time?

"Are you quite sure you're all right?" Dunham asked.

"Oh! yes. It's nothing at all. The air is different here—it's much higher—up among

these old mountains." And in a moment more they had entered the great hall of the big summer hostelry.

Except for employés the place was almost deserted. Dunham found a chair for Elizabeth where she waited while he spoke with the clerk at the desk. Soon he joined her again.

"The café is still open downstairs," he explained. "Let me give your coat to the boy and he'll put it in our suite while we go down and have a bite to eat. You must be hungry, after that long ride."

III

In the restaurant a few guests were still lingering. Dunham ordered supper, and picking up the wine-list said—

"You must have something to make you warm. What shall it be? A little brandy would be good for you first, I think."

But she would take nothing.

"But you must be tired," he told her. "A

glass of champagne—you'll drink that, surely. . . ."

She smiled at him across the table and shook her head.

"No, thank you, Ralph. I don't feel like it to-night," she said.

So Dunham ordered himself a whiskey-and-soda; and the waiter hurried away.

It seemed to Elizabeth that she could never swallow a mouthful again. It was silly of her, she knew; but the muscles of her throat seemed to have tightened and she had hard work to sit there calmly and smile, and talk to her husband. There was a strange sensation of weakness about her knees. She had a peculiar feeling that her soul had entered some other person's body, which had brought her with the man Dunham thither to that strange place.

Just what happened during that little supper —their first meal together—Elizabeth could never quite remember. Perhaps the events that followed so swiftly upon it drove from her

mind everything that immediately preceded them.

She retained a hazy recollection of stepping out of an elevator into one of the halls above and waiting for a moment before a door while somebody fumbled at the lock. And then the door was swung open. Within was inky blackness; and she hesitated on the threshold until a sudden click of a button flooded the place with light.

"Good-night, sir! Thank you, sir!" she heard someone say, and the door closed softly. When Dunham turned the key in the lock she strangled a sudden impulse to scream.

IV

They were alone in the parlor of the suite; and in the chamber that opened out of it Elizabeth saw two white beds side by side. There were no more rooms.

Dunham hung his motoring cap in the wardrobe; while Elizabeth slowly removed her veil and hat and laid them upon the dresser. As

she looked into the mirror she saw that there were shadows under her eyes, and that her lips were pale. And a horrid fear gripped her. She had trusted Ralph. . . . She had explained to him. . . . And now the aspect of the suite alarmed her.

Dunham noticed her agitated breathing and he saw her hand pressed violently against her throbbing heart.

"What is it?" he asked with solicitude. "Are you ill, my dear? Tell me!"

She smiled at him sadly, and shook her head.

"Something's the trouble—something's wrong," he insisted. "You must tell me—you must trust me—to take care of you now and see that nothing harms you."

"I—I *have* trusted you," she said. "There's nothing really the matter with me—except I dare say I'm tired." And then, without any warning, she fell into a spasm of weeping.

Dunham was genuinely distressed. He bent over her anxiously.

"There, there! Don't cry!" he said.

"You're completely fagged out. The wedding was too much for you. It was a nervous strain. But it's all over now and there's going to be nothing more to worry about."

His words both relieved and reassured her.

"You're good to me," she said, drying her tears. "I knew you would be good to me. But perhaps you don't quite understand me. I—I didn't say anything about it—I thought you'd know. Please don't feel hurt by what I'm going to say. But I really thought you would get me a room of my own. I thought you'd understand that—that while we'd see a great deal of each other, and go about together, and be good friends, you would not expect any more from me than from a friend or a sister. And I know you don't, of course. And so, when I came into the suite and saw what it was like I couldn't understand. I don't understand now." She turned to him appealingly. Tears still trembled in her eyes and her anxious face betrayed the fear under which she labored.

Dunham listened to her in amazement. He

could scarcely credit what his own ears heard. And before he could gather his scattered wits and speak, a wild rage swept over him—a fierce, mad anger, not for the frail girl alone with him, but against society for its stupid education of children; against Stephen and Margaret Ferris for having reared their daughter in ignorance. It was indeed true that Elizabeth's up-bringing had been not merely one of silences but even suppressions. And Dunham recognized in a sudden flash of understanding that she had virtually no conception of the physical life of a man and a woman. It was all a sealed book to her.

Poor, ignorant, innocent, unhappy creature! His anger ebbed as quickly as it came as he regarded her compassionately.

"Don't be frightened," he said gravely, "by the questions I'm going to ask you. You expected a separate room, I take it, as a natural consequence of the 'freedom' for which you stipulated when I asked you to marry me. Is that not so? Yes? I see. We understand

each other, *now,* or at least *I* understand *you.* This marriage, then, that we have entered into, is really no marriage at all. It's a sort of contract, more oral than written,—what we call in business a 'gentlemen's agreement'—the conditions of which may or may not be changed in the course of time."

Elizabeth did not see why he should rehearse the terms of their partnership, but she nodded her affirmation of his statement. Nor could she fathom the strange look that he gave her.

"Am I repulsive to you?" he asked her abruptly. "Do I fill you with repugnance? Tell me, in all frankness; for if I do I would not inflict myself—even my occasional presence—upon you any longer."

Elizabeth stared at him wonderingly. She was sitting upon one of the beds now, while Dunham slowly paced the floor in front of her.

"Tell me how you really feel toward me," he urged.

There was no fear in her face now—only a mild and trusting look of comradeship, such as

a child might bestow upon someone in whose care he had been placed. Dunham winced under it. It was not the look a man expects to receive from his bride.

"How I feel toward you?" she repeated. "What a queer question, Ralph. Well—I'll tell you, though you must know already. I look on you as my best friend, as someone who will always be good to me—kind, gentle, considerate; as a pleasant companion; a chum to go about with."

"Rather a Platonic sort of affair—this marriage of ours—don't you think?" he inquired bitterly.

"Yes, I suppose it is. But of course, we both understood that in the beginning," she replied.

He had not the heart to enlighten her, then. He could not tell her that their different conceptions of life had betrayed them into the grossest of follies. Was it a just punishment for him—a sort of ironical justice meted out to him because he had been willing to enter into a barren marriage?

"So you like me—as a chaperon—so long as I keep within certain bounds?"

She smiled at his description of himself, for she did not guess the struggle that was going on beneath his outer calm.

"That's it—precisely," she admitted. "I shall like to feel that you're where I can always find you, if I need you. I shall like to know that you are not far away from me—and yet not too near. It's a strange attitude, perhaps, though I should think many women would feel that way toward their husbands. I—I couldn't have you hold me so that I couldn't slip away. That's the sort of freedom that I can't give up."

He nodded. Well—far be it from him to seek to deprive her of that freedom to which she believed he had agreed. He must have time to think. The situation was impossible—intolerable. He felt stifled all at once—choking. There flashed across his mind the remembrance of a fight of his younger days, when a man's fingers had closed round his throat in an iron grip. He shuddered involuntarily. He had not

been beaten then; but now he had gone down to defeat before a slip of a girl. He could have sworn at himself in his impotent anger. But he only said to his bride—

"This is stupid—this mistake about our suite. But it's easily remedied. There's a lounge outside in the parlor. I'll be all right. So—good-night! You have everything you need? Good! Good-night!"

Dunham shifted the key of the connecting door to the keyhole on the bedroom side. It was a spring-lock, and as he went out he closed the door firmly behind him.

CHAPTER IX

NOT STRICTLY ACCORDING TO PROGRAM

I

In the parlor of the apartment Dunham passed a wakeful night. He tried to consider the situation calmly; but now and again a wave of hot resentment surged over him and it required all his strength to stifle the impulse to shout out so that all the world might hear; to cry aloud that he had been victimized—cheated of his just due—that his manhood had been betrayed. He felt tricked—caught beyond any chance of escape in the relentless jaws of a trap which had been partly of his own forging. Again and again he crushed down his man's craving for violent action, which was but nature's attempt to supply a vent for his seething emotions. And in the stillness of the night he came at last to a saner view of his dilemma.

Would Elizabeth's attitude change as time went on? The disgust and dread with which she obviously regarded the vital facts of existence—would they ever give way to the natural attitude of a normal woman? He wondered. It was a riddle that was beyond his capacity to solve. Suppose her peculiar perversion of instinct were unalterable? Could he go on through the years hoping nothing, expecting nothing? What effect would her temperamental insufficiency have upon them both? He could not even guess, as he sat before the fireplace until the gray light began to creep in through the shutters, while he watched the ashes gently dropping from the dying fire.

II

They had planned to spend two days at Marwood; but for Dunham any longer stop at that now hateful place was impossible. He experienced an uncontrollable desire to flee from the scene of his horrid awakening—to leave it behind—never to see again the spot where his

newly-built air-castle had tumbled about his ears. At breakfast he suggested moving on and Elizabeth, refreshed and smiling after a good night's sleep, agreed promptly to the change of programme.

So Dunham ordered the car and they traveled on. That day was typical of many others that followed, made up of hours of scurrying over hill and valley. Dunham, who had always hitherto preferred to be driven slowly, now developed a mania for speed. It gave him a strange sense of relief from the tension that strung all his nerves taut until it seemed to him that something would snap within him. Continually he urged the chauffeur on until that careful driver, marveling at the change of temper that had come over his employer, registered a vow never to pilot another bridal couple along the path of their honeymoon. The poor fellow breathed a sigh of relief whenever they turned in at a hotel for a meal or a night's lodging. The mad pace at which Dunham made him send the car flying down the New England hills was

often really dangerous. It was not so bad when they kept to the main roads; but sometimes the whim seized Dunham to shun the more traveled highways and then with undiminished speed they jolted and rattled their way over ruts and stones in a fashion that made Elizabeth's heart jump with alarm. But her husband did not notice her consternation.

So they traveled on, up through the Connecticut Valley, across the White Mountains, then into Maine, and Canada. But hurry as he would, Ralph Dunham could not escape from the nightmare that had fastened itself upon him. And his mood at last underwent a change. From a desire to avoid contact with other people he was sensible of a need of companionship. He felt that he must be with men—that he must talk with them and drink with them and smoke with them—with fellow-creatures whom he understood and who were sane. For he began to have doubts of his own sanity.

Elizabeth, too, found their lone companionship depressing. It was all too anomalous,

though she did not guess the reason. They were wed and yet not wed. They were attempting something that was an enormity for a man and a woman physically healthy and mentally sane. And upon them both descended an unrest such as neither had ever known before. And yet they tired of the constant rushing helter-skelter over the face of the earth.

And then the whim seized Dunham to go abroad. His yacht, the *Nomad,* was in commission, lying then at Newport, awaiting his orders; for he had half intended to have it meet him at some point along the coast. But now he quailed at the very thought of a solitary cruise with his wife. Inquiry disclosed the fact that a liner was about to sail from Montreal and the Dunhams caught it on the eve of its departure.

The first stage of their strange honeymoon was finished.

CHAPTER X

FACING FACTS

I

Along with thousands of other home-comers, September brought the Dunhams back to New York. Ralph had not allowed his wife to know of the misunderstanding that had existed between them previous to that unforgettable night at Marwood—the first night after their wedding. He had made a firm resolve that he would not disillusion Elizabeth while her honeymoon lasted. How long thereafter could he silently endure the situation? He did not know. He could not guess. He was aware only of an enormous loneliness from which he could not escape. The trying weeks which had elapsed since his marriage had changed him strangely. Before, he had always been self-sufficient. It had made no difference in his happiness whether

he was with others or not; whether he found his associates congenial or not. He was not like so many people who are miserable when they are alone, or who are wretched when they are thrown in with individuals they dislike; who have no capacity for self-reliance. But now—as never before during his lifetime—he felt terribly alone.

Perhaps it was because he was at the same time so near and yet so far from her who should have been closest and dearest to him. He had not thought, at first, that the restraint imposed upon him would prove so difficult to endure. In the beginning he had regarded Elizabeth merely as a pretty, attractive child. She had had no real place in his thoughts—much less in his affections. But since they had been together his attitude toward her had undergone a change. Her personality, only half-fathomed by him as it was, piquing his interest at first, had gradually come to claim a large place in his imagination. He had thought, after the first shock of the dénouement at Marwood, that life

with her on a Platonic basis was possible for him. But as time went on he was not content. He could not divert his thoughts from the shy creature he had captured but whose confidence he had not. He lay awake during long, dreary nights until he actually ground his teeth in a frenzy of despair. Never before had he known what it was to be afraid. He both feared and hated the desolate silence of the night, unbroken by so much as a whisper of her whom he at last told himself he loved.

Yes! the miracle had happened! He loved the sweet, timid, innocent girl that God had given him and yet withheld from him. He longed to catch her in his eager embrace and hold her close, knowing that she belonged to him and him alone. Whenever she shyly turned her long-lashed child-like eyes to his he felt a strange thrill, such as he had never known before. He watched her lips when she spoke to him; and he longed to draw her tenderly to him and kiss her fresh young mouth.

But all such caresses were forbidden him.

He knew it—knew it with a tragic conviction. And Dunham mastered himself. He could only hover about her and drink in her loveliness with longing eyes. Beyond that he could not go; for he had quickly discovered that his smallest advance sent her quivering away from him. She recoiled from the merest touch of his hand. And after he had seen her shrink from him a few times he had studiously avoided the slightest contact with her.

So he lived with her—lived with her and still without her—tortured by the most exquisite agony.

II

A fortnight in New York brought Dunham to the breaking point. His nerves began playing him odd tricks. He slept less and less. After nights of restless tossing he rose each succeeding morning wearier than he had been the day before. His business affairs no longer interested him. Unwillingly he went to his Wall Street office and forced himself to take up such

matters as demanded his attention. But his mind seemed to have lost its old-time faculty for quick and decisive dealing. He had difficulty even in grasping the salient features of a project. For his thoughts constantly reverted to the slender girl who had claimed his heart, though withholding hers from him.

To cap the climax, one day Dunham made a colossal blunder. It was a matter involving the control of a railroad, a connecting link between two of his Western lines which he had been trying for years to capture. At last the thing was virtually in his grasp. Before he could put out his hand and lay claim to the property as his there remained only one move. And that last strategic play he bungled hopelessly. The damage was done almost before he knew it and he saw the work of years rendered futile.

It was not so much the loss of the millions of money that startled him. He had lost his grip —that was what appalled him. He was a Samson shorn of his locks. And like Samson, his wife was his undoing.

III

Dunham was thoroughly alarmed. His first thought was to see a doctor—a specialist of some sort. But when he turned the matter over in his mind he knew that no medical man could help him. His trouble lay hidden from the reach of drugs. The malady was beyond the help of mere man. And he realized that he must fight the battle unaided.

He must go away. He must leave Elizabeth. The very sight of her was maddening. To be with her was agony. He could only try the remedy of removing himself from her presence for a time, in what he feared would prove only a futile effort to forget her.

So it came about that Ralph Dunham told his wife one evening that he had been asked to join a party of men who were going on a West Indian cruise. He saw with a pang that she welcomed the news. She even urged him to go. And so it was settled. Elizabeth announced on the spot that she would pay her parents a visit in

his absence. At dinner that night she was gayer than her husband had seen her for months.

Her laughter cut him to the quick.

CHAPTER XI

A GLIMPSE OF THE REAL

I

BACK again in her father's house, Elizabeth gave a sigh of relief. At last she had escaped from her husband's irritating nearness. It was good to feel that she could move about as she chose, without his constant escort; that she could go down to a meal rid of the necessity of facing him across the table and making labored efforts at conversation. And the knowledge that her respite was to be but brief made her freedom all the sweeter.

Her parents had guessed from her letters that all was not as it should be between bride and bridegroom. But they had not suspected the real status of affairs. Consequently, when Elizabeth told her mother, as she soon did, of the basis upon which she and Dunham had ar-

ranged their married life, Margaret Ferris' eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"But, my dear child," she exclaimed, "didn't you realize things in the beginning? Didn't you understand?"

"When I first met him? No, I didn't. He was nice to me and kind. But I didn't know then what marriage meant, and you ought to have told me. I should have known then that I could never be Ralph's wife."

"You'll get used to it."

"Never, never, never!"

"My dear, you will. You must. You are a woman, and you must fulfill your destiny. It is of no use to try to escape it."

"Oh, Mother, you married the man you loved."

"Yes, but it comes to the same thing in the end. Your father lives his own life and I live mine. It's separation, none the less for being amicable."

"Oh, Mamma!"

"Hush, child; don't be silly. You have to

know these things now. Very few marriages are happy. In most there's a rift which makes itself evident sooner or later. Then, if the people are well bred, they agree each to go his own way. If they are foolish there's a horrid quarrel, and then another and another, until it comes to a scandal, and everything has to be known by everybody."

Elizabeth was cold with horror. To hear that her father and mother, the two people she loved most in the world, were not the happy couple she had always imagined them to be, was so shocking that it seemed to complete the transformation of the world from the happy place she had thought it to a very Gehenna.

She sat down quickly, saying nothing, but feeling as if the ground were giving way under her feet. Where was she to look for comfort, for support, when those she had thought to lean on failed her like that?

For a little while they were quite silent, Mrs. Ferris walking to the nearest window rest-

lessly and looking out, and Elizabeth leaning on her hand without even looking at her.

Presently Margaret came back to Elizabeth and put her hand on her daughter's shoulder.

"You musn't think me unkind, Elizabeth," she said, in a gentle tone, not like her sweet "society" cooing voice. "But believe me, child, I know everything, and I understand everything, and I'm dreadfully sorry that it should all have come to your knowledge so suddenly."

"But why need it have?" Elizabeth cried. "Why was I brought up in complete ignorance of facts that half the world knows and accepts quite as a matter of course? It was unfair—it was wrong—it was cruelly wrong!"

At this outburst Margaret sat down beside her child and said in her most wheedling and confidential manner—

"No, I couldn't tell you anything. If I had it wouldn't have come off. One can never tell a girl, or she would never make a good marriage."

Elizabeth shuddered. How could she use such a word to her now?

"A *good* marriage!" she echoed in a disgusted tone.

But Mrs. Ferris was quite herself again. She frowned imperiously at her rebellious child.

"Yes, a good marriage," she repeated. "There is only one sort of marriage that is good, even tolerable, and that is marriage with money. It is a horrible thing to have to acknowledge, but there is no use in blinking the fact. Marriage, life itself, is impossible nowadays, without money; and having found a good husband, a girl should not think, when she marries, that she will have everything she wants and that there will be nothing in life to put up with. That is an impossible state of things. There must always be little causes of disagreement between the most devoted husband and wife; but the wise ones make the best of it, and remember the reasons why they married, and are content with something less than ideal happiness."

Elizabeth looked at her mother closely.

"Why did I marry, pray tell me?" she asked. "Did I want money so much? Do you think such a thing as money can compensate me for being tied for life to a man who is abhorrent to me? I can tell you why I married Ralph. It was simply and solely because you and father urged me to. And now I begin to see why. Now I begin to understand. You—you were the ones who needed money. I have asked Ralph if that is not so, but he would tell me nothing. I have a right to know. If he gave you money I have a right to know."

"Very well!" her mother said. "I would rather not have told you, but, as you say, you have a right to know, and so you shall. Your father's affairs were desperate, and he could no longer take care of us in the way we were accustomed to live. There were burdens on his property—mortgages. They were about to fall due. And your father not only had no money with which to pay them off, but he owed everybody—florists, and dressmakers, and

butchers, and the whole hungry pack. Then Dunham saw you and fell in love with you. And he proposed for you to your father. He was very generous—let us have all we wanted and made the handsomest offers, so that, no matter what may happen, you will be all right. There, that's all!"

"All!" Elizabeth exclaimed, sickened by her mother's unblushing confession. "So you sold me—and never told me a word of the horrible bargain you made. You deceived me—oh! why could you not have told me?"

"No, that was impossible. Men like Ralph Dunham don't come in one's way every day. When one does, and proposes marriage, there is only one thing to be done—to accept him." And then she added, after a moment—"You know, don't you, dear, that one can't bring up young girls except as one does? One always hopes that one may be able to give them everything to make them happy without having to do violence to one's own feelings and theirs.

But then, when the time comes, and one recognizes the truth that only money can make a marriage endurable, why, one has to make the best of it, and the girl, once married, has to make the best of it too."

II

Sold! Sold! The hopelessness of it all, and the horror of it, and the knowledge that she could not put things right made Elizabeth weep bitter tears in the secrecy of her bedroom. Her mother's revelation had left her so lonely, so miserable, and so revolted, that she felt as if she could not go on living unless she could find some way out of the frightful tangle.

Was it in any way her own fault? She did not think so. She was flung into marriage, without being allowed to know what she was doing. She realized that that was the only way it could have been done. She wondered if her father and mother knew how wicked they had been. The whole thing seemed so horrible—

that she had been bartered by her own flesh—that she was almost stunned by the contemplation of the truth.

She wondered if the clergyman who married them—old Mr. Cartwright—had known, whether he would have performed the ceremony just the same! She was afraid he would. She was afraid he would have been more shocked by the idea of his having any responsibility in the matter, than by what he had to do in tying a girl of twenty for life to a man twice her age whom she did not love.

Sold! Sold! Surely they ought not to have done it! Surely they, who knew all about it, ought not to have sold her into bondage. She groaned aloud. It was horrible, horrible! Not to love the man one marries—that must be hard. But to hate him! (and she did hate him!) that was worse.

She hated it all. She dreaded the future. She could not bear to think about the future even then. When she thought of living out a lifetime with her husband, she felt as if she

were stranded on some desert island, with only a wild animal for a companion. If only she had the courage to end it all—to die and so escape the intolerable bond that bound her!

CHAPTER XII

OUT OF THE STAGNANT HARBOR

I

Another summer had arrived, but with it had come no change in the relations of Dunham and his wife. Meanwhile Elizabeth spent no more time with Ralph than seemed absolutely required of her—indeed she had slept more frequently under her father's roof than beneath her husband's.

At Ferris' invitation, Craig Clifton had come to Oak Ledge for the week-end. There was business that demanded attention. It was June and Stephen knew that New York was hot, and humid, and reeking with divers unpleasant odors. He had no desire to set foot in the City. So he asked Clifton to make a pilgrimage into the Berkshires.

The pressure of work had kept Clifton in

town steadily and he welcomed an excuse to escape to the country and avoid even a few of the depressing, enervating days of New York in midsummer. He arrived at the Ferris' house late at night after a tiring journey in a stifling, dusty train; and after being greeted by his host he had gone straight to his room and to bed. There was a lively gathering upon the piazza, but Clifton had not tarried to meet the other guests.

The next morning he awakened early, to the song of chirping birds. A fresh, perfume-laden breeze was moving the curtains at his windows and though it was hours earlier than he was wont to rise when in town, he responded to the call of the country and dressed quickly.

After he had finished the coffee and rolls which were brought to his chamber, he made his way to the gardens lying at the back of the house and followed along the hedge-lined paths which wove their way in and out. Here and there he came upon a gardener busy with his weeding; but of the guests of the night before he

saw nothing. Finding a comfortable seat placed invitingly beneath a cherry-tree, he sat down to enjoy a cigarette. After the swelter of New York it was delightful to be there in the bright sunshine, and hear the twitter of birds and smell the fragrance of flowers. He had not sat there long when a step sounded on the graveled path behind him. He turned instantly and sprang quickly to his feet. It was Mrs. Ralph Dunham, with her hands full of roses. Clifton recognized her immediately, though he had seen her but once before—on the occasion when he had been presented to her at her father's house.

"Ah!" she said. "You are Mr. Clifton, are you not? You too!—you could not resist the beautiful morning. But you have been idle, while I have been busy, as you see," she explained, raising her flowers for him to admire.

"They are beautiful, Mrs. Dunham," Clifton said, and his heart pounded hard against his ribs. "They are beautiful, and you—" He stopped suddenly, amazed at himself that he

should be so moved at the sight of her; and he paused just in time to choke off a most flagrant compliment.

"And I am very energetic, you must agree," she said, finishing his sentence for him.

Clifton let her interruption pass unchallenged. He had not meant his remark to end as she would have it; but fortunately he had realized before it was too late that it was decidedly presumptuous of him to be making pretty speeches to Mrs. Dunham.

"Will you wear one of my roses?" she asked him.

"With much pleasure, if you will choose one," he told her.

"Oh, you must tell me which you like best," she said. "A pink one, or a white one, or a red? For me—I love the red," and she buried her pretty nose deep in a cluster of crimson blossoms.

Clifton thought they matched the red of her lips. He touched gently the flower her mouth had pressed.

"This one, please!" he said.

"Ah! so you prefer that color, too?" she exclaimed, as she held the blossom out to him. She smiled, and Clifton felt that no more glorious morning had ever dawned, since the beginning of things.

"How can those stupid people spend so much time asleep?" she asked, as she looked toward the house. "I want to go for a ride, and there are just we two up."

"Perhaps you will let me go with you?" he suggested.

"Do you really wish to come?" she asked. "Then let us hurry and dress. I will see that the horses are saddled and waiting for us."

II

Off they went, the two of them, and the brisk, delicious air and the charm of the exercise made Elizabeth forget her troubles. For once—for the first time since her marriage—she was young and buoyant, seizing with eager hands the passing pleasure.

Soon the road took them into a wonderful old beech wood, where the long amber rays of the early morning sun slanted athwart the brown, gnarled trunks and danced and quivered in the cool, green depths of the midsummer foliage. Through the tree-tops the sky appeared like a gigantic plain of clearest azure and crystal. They spoke little, at first, as they rode along the forest path. The caressing branches touched them gently as they passed and now and then a squirrel cocked his eyes curiously at them, and a brightly feathered songster bade them a cheery good-morning. Coming out upon an undulating meadow road their mounts broke into a sweeping canter and the early breeze, laden with puffs of clover, wooed their faces sweetly.

Craig Clifton was in paradise and Elizabeth, too, was radiant.

As he looked at her, with her white flawless skin contrasting sharply with her chestnut hair and the deep red of her lips, he was certain that nowhere was there a match for that divine

creature. He saw with appreciation how her slight yet well-knit body swayed subtly with the movement of her mount, and he admired the firm but delicate way in which her hand felt her horse's mouth.

"You're fond of riding, aren't you?" he said.

"I have loved horses since I was a little girl," she told him, simply. "It is my greatest pleasure to be out in the open like this early in the day. There's nothing to compare with the feeling of life and buoyancy it gives one."

Craig wished that he might spend all the mornings of his life with her like this. But he could not tell his companion that. He could only talk commonplaces and tell her about the favorite horses he had had, from Peter, his first pony, to Bolero, his latest Irish hunter.

And as they talked gaily their horses carried them further and further out into the rolling country-side. When they came to a small brook, which ran placidly between willow-fringed banks, Elizabeth brought her horse to a stop.

"See!" she said. "How pretty it must be up there along the stream! Let us explore a little!" And so they tied their horses to a fence and rambled carelessly beside the tiny rivulet.

Soon they came to a spot where it was necessary to cross upon the rocks to the opposite bank. Elizabeth would not let Clifton help her. She was sure she was entirely able to manage the crossing alone.

Forgetful of his own footing, in his careful watch of her, he slipped on a stone, sending one of his feet into the water.

They both laughed, which was the only thing they could possibly do, being young and joyful with the gladness of youth and summer time; but when a moment later it was quite necessary for him to touch her hand in assisting her to cross a tiny silver tributary of the stream, the laughter was hushed by the engulfing influence of a sudden immense emotion.

They both knew, in that instant, through the mysterious free-masonry of sex, that they were strangely drawn to each other.

He should have avoided it: he—whose eyes saw things more clearly than hers. He should have realized the danger.

But his brain was a bit clouded by the veil of his emotions.

He knew that already he regarded her differently from the way he regarded other women and he felt that he wanted to get rid of all barriers as quickly as possible.

This girl with the beautiful throat and the serious eyes made a direct and instant appeal to him. He could no more help touching her than the butterfly can help touching the petals of the rose. He didn't want to think anything out—to plan anything or grapple with anything—he only wanted immediately to begin enjoying the rapture of being passionately in love with a woman who was the right age to be loved passionately. . . .

There was brilliance in her eyes, and there was rose-pink on her cheeks, and when she smiled it was without restraint.

He felt as if just at this precise moment life

were beginning, as if it were absurd ever to imagine that it could have begun before.

They stopped and rested upon the bank. Elizabeth sat quite still and tried not to be conscious of anything except the green of the leaves rustling overhead.

She would just go on thinking about those green leaves and—ah! no, she couldn't go on thinking about those because a little bird with a speckled breast had flown on to the bough! The little bird—a plump little preening hen-thing—was now attracting her attention, and—and—*there,* now another little bird had joined her on the bough.

But the newcomer was a slimly-smart young bird, and they were chirruping together and their beaks were touching, and—and . . .

With a flame Elizabeth Dunham's face grew hot, for she had suddenly remembered that these preening, twittering birds were part of nature's stupendous scheme, which was the main element of all creation.

These happy, chirruping birds were proba-

bly mated birds who had loved in the spring-time.

Everything and everybody seemed concerned in the sex-scheme, and the girl could feel a new rushing and stirring of her own blood.

Vague unrest, a longing which would not be explained, a strange heart-hunger—all these sensations she had known before.

But now this was something different.

She felt like a person rushing on toward a precipice—no, she felt as if the precipice were advancing toward her—no, she felt as if a great warm ocean of scented, swamping waves were about to engulf her—and in the waves she could see—she hardly knew what.

Life was beginning—the gates were opening as lock-gates open to show the glory of a river that runs down to—limitless sea—life—life!

III

Clifton was sorry when the time came to return to the road and turn their horses' heads homewards. As they followed slowly along the

bridle-path, which wound like a brown ribbon through meadow and woodland, the sweet scent of wild flowers came from the roadside and the whole face of the world was aflame with a gorgeous golden tint, such as art has neither name for, nor power to reproduce.

There were few spoken words between them as they rode back to the house.

Why was there a strange bursting ache in her heart?

What did she want? What was there which she should have, yet had not?

As Clifton bent toward her softly in the shadow of the beech wood voluntarily she moved away, though the next moment a wave of womanly tenderness swept over her. She was sorry for him. And as Clifton bent lower and looked into her eyes he saw an indefinable something in their depths that sobered the riot in his veins.

He smiled at her. Somehow that was all he dared do, then.

CHAPTER XIII

YOUTH WILL BE SERVED

I

During the remainder of the day Clifton found little opportunity to be with his host's daughter. Most of the time he spent with Ferris, going over the details of some real estate entanglements in which Stephen had become involved during that stage of dwindling fortune from which Dunham had rescued him.

And Elizabeth? What of her all this time? For it is not to be supposed that she did not have her thoughts and moods, hopes and fears, joys and misgivings.

When a woman—that is to say an inherently moral woman—recalls with rapture the touch of one particular man, it may be safely reckoned that his personality has made a deep impress upon her.

She knew that she had never met a man who had appealed to her in just the way that Clifton did. And all that day he was constantly in her thoughts.

There was a dance at Oak Ledge that evening. Not till then, since his arrival on the previous night, had Clifton had an opportunity to mingle with the other visitors. There were many in addition to the members of the house-party—owners of neighboring estates, most of whom brought guests of their own.

After Clifton had played a game of billiards with Bradley, a man whom he knew, and had finished a cigar, he sought the ball-room. One figure only filled his whole mind—that of Mrs. Dunham—and it was she whom he went to the ball-room to find.

But after scanning the swaying, gliding dancers for a time he decided that she was not there. He left the place.

She wasn't in the great drawing-room, among the girls and their partners and their chaperons galore; she wasn't in the writing-room;

she wasn't on any of the corridor seats; she wasn't on the balcony.

This was annoying, because now that Clifton found it difficult to catch the desired glimpse of her face, the wish only increased in fervor.

A girl! It was very extraordinary for him to be so interested in a girl! But there it was —he wanted to see her face more than he wanted anything else in the world.

So after exploring all the near-by rooms Craig Clifton enlarged the field of his search. He walked the length of the long corridor, for he remembered a small piazza that could be reached from the further end of the passage. Skillfully avoiding the pitfalls spread for him by various willing maidens, he made his way quickly to the secluded, vine-covered nook.

And there, looking serenely down at the moon-lit garden below, stood the woman that he sought. She was alone, and at the sound of his step she turned and in the half-light they saw each other's faces.

In another moment Clifton had spoken her

name softly, and gently held both her soft, cool hands in his.

II

It is so hard to find accurate phrases when the wine of music is inebriating the senses!

Clifton, unconsciously guiding his partner in and out among the other dancing couples, only knew that he was supremely happy.

Elizabeth, too, experienced unwonted self-communings. For her it seemed that the world contained nothing but him—for him it seemed that the world contained nothing but her!

So they swayed with the rhythm of the piece, till suddenly the *motif* changed.

Then, with the change of the *motif,* the girl's whole nature changed. It was as if she were letting herself go without knowing it.

Ah! how the strings were wailing and how the melody was throbbing on the air!

She could look up at him and see the little cleft in the center of his chin, and the sweetness of his lips when he smiled, and the light shining

through one obtrusive little outstanding lock of hair which would insist upon breaking into definite curl.

Ah! the swell of the 'cellos as they took up the crying of the theme! like a passion dirge of living loves!

Craig Clifton looked at the girl, who nestled in his embrace. He looked at the cool pale skin, beneath which throbbed the pulse of youth; he looked at the little scarlet mouth—such a little mouth, but full and sweet and dewy—and he looked at the gentle rising and falling of her bosom.

In the crash of the music sounded triumph, wild mysticism and humanity; in the rapture of the notes rang love's uncheckable passion.

Clifton's breath came faster and faster—and the minor melody of the stringed band sobbed and swelled. With the masterful air of a man who demands the right to be a lover—"Let's go out," he said quickly—"let's go out into the garden!"

"Yes, we will go out and invade the moonlight," she answered, and he followed, followed with a firm look on his well-shaped mouth, and a fixed brilliance in his blue eyes.

When they had passed into the shadow of the trees, he took one of her hands and drew it under his arm, drew it there so that he could more easily steer her toward the wicket gate, which led to a bower of shrubbery beyond.

Yes, they were going through the wicket gate and down the little path to a very paradise of lovers. They would be alone—entirely alone, as nature meant lovers to be.

"Have you missed me?" was the first thing he said to her.

"Missed you?" She instinctively temporized with him, for after all she was a woman, strengthened by the knowledge of her newly found power.

"Yes, missed me, and wanted me, as I want you now, *as I want you now.*"

"Yes, I missed you, and—and—wanted you."

It was her first confession, but it came easily, far more easily than she could have believed that it would be possible to confess.

So at last he was satisfied, for the moment.

She had missed him! She had wanted him—so now—nothing but love lay ahead!

They found a seat, screened by a bank of blossoming hedge, and sitting there both sensed the potency of a force that seemed stronger than they were.

She had never felt like this before.

It was pleasant to feel the cool night breezes blowing upon her face. Everything was mysterious, enchanting. The June roses were sending up a perfume almost unholy in its sweetness. The flowers were like girls with youthful faces and passionate souls.

And the moon was shining—not innocently, somehow, even though her light was white and silvery. And there were the stars, unreachable, far-away stars, sparkling with the brilliancy of elusive hopes and elusive desires, which can never be fulfilled.

Oh! what were those elusive hopes and desires beating so quickly at her heart?

Why was there a sob at her throat?

A strange uneasiness came over her—and then, before she knew what had happened, Clifton had kissed her and crushed her in the soft silence of the night.

But not a single endearing word left his lips. The moment was too poignant for speech.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE FLOOD

I

During the remainder of that summer Elizabeth and Clifton saw much of each other. It was surprising how many details of her father's business Clifton found it necessary to discuss in person with his client, with the result that week after week saw him making pilgrimages to Oak Ledge.

For those two enamored ones—Craig and Elizabeth—the time alternately dragged and flew. During the intervals in which they were separated they were in an impatient fever of expectancy, chafing under the delay which must ensue each week until they should meet again.

At first neither of them realized the *impasse* into which their folly was leading them. When they were together there was the excitement

of the moment to blur their powers of comprehension; and when they were apart the overwhelming desire to bridge the chasm of time and space between them made them oblivious of everything except that poignant longing.

It was inevitable that they could not go on indefinitely without their secret being discovered by some one; and it was Margaret who found them out at last. She happened to intercept just one unguarded glance between the two; and it was enough. Her woman's intuition at once supplied the whole story. Before she slept that night she accused Elizabeth of being in love with Clifton, and confirmed her fears.

II

Ralph Dunham had a country-place of his own, on the Connecticut shore of the Sound. It was a beautiful estate. A long house, smothered in roses and creepers, capped its highest eminence and afforded a wide view of rolling hills and water.

Elizabeth had spent very little time at the

Connecticut house. She had gone there once or twice at Dunham's request, in order to play the hostess when he had guests there from whom he especially wished to keep any suspicion of the fact that all was not as it should be between them. But except upon those occasions she had avoided the place. The Knolls, as Dunham had named the estate, possessed no attraction for her—at least not enough to counterbalance her distaste for being more or less thrown in her husband's society.

It came as a shock to Elizabeth when her mother announced that she must leave Oak Ledge at once and join Ralph at The Knolls.

"You are making a terrible mistake," Margaret told her. "I'm astonished that you have encouraged Clifton. The affair must end now. Indeed it's a mercy that no one else has discovered this foolishness. If Clifton must come here on your father's business I suppose it's out of the question to suppose that you won't keep on seeing each other. So there's just one thing to be done. I've already told your maid to

pack your luggage and you are going to go and live under your husband's roof."

The information rather took away Elizabeth's breath for a moment. At first she was moved to rebel at her mother's harshness. But she quickly made up her mind that she might better go. She knew she would have no peace in the same house with her zealous parent.

"I'm quite ready to do as you wish," she said. "But I never thought I'd be turned out of my own father's house and I shall never forget it."

"Don't be silly," her mother told her. "It's simply for your own good that I'm doing this."

"For my good? Since when, pray, have you been thinking about *me?*" Elizabeth asked bitterly. "I believe you're afraid. I believe you expect more money from Ralph and you're afraid you'll lose it."

"That's unkind," her mother said quickly —"most unkind of you. And I'll not argue the point with you. If you were not a goose you could see for yourself where your folly would

end. Such affairs as this between you and Clifton spell divorce in large capital letters. I don't mean to have our good name dragged through the mire by a headstrong girl. It's only the greatest good fortune that has prevented a scandal already. Who knows who might have seen you and Clifton mooning about? It takes very little to set people's tongues wagging."

Elizabeth had to shut her eyes tight to prevent the tears from falling. How miserable she felt! What a life it had turned out to be! What a fulfillment of her dreams of independent happiness! At the end of those weary months of marriage she was lonely and friendless—friendless except for Craig, and now her mother was trying to put him away from her. She opened her eyes and stared miserably out into the gray afternoon light. She felt that she could not listen to another word and without looking at her mother again she hurried off to her chamber.

In her room she threw herself down upon her bed and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"I think I am going mad," she cried; "mad! Oh, how will it all end?"

III

Dunham was astonished when Elizabeth arrived at The Knolls and announced that she had come for an indefinite stay. Had she experienced a sudden change of heart? The hope quickened within him that at last in some mysterious way her attitude toward him had altered. But he was soon forced to acknowledge to himself that the status of their relations was to continue as before. Elizabeth showed no desire even for his casual companionship. On the very day of her arrival she sent out notes to a dozen people inviting them to a house-party.

Among the letters was one addressed to Craig Clifton.

IV

Elizabeth and Clifton were alone in her little private sitting-room, a tiny retreat which opened out of her boudoir. They had just returned from a long walk. He was leaning over the back of a settee on which she was resting. It was a great comfort to her to have him near her again.

"Elizabeth," he said suddenly, "have you not wondered how all this is going to end?"

"End?" she exclaimed, looking up at him in surprise. "Do you mean that we must—must part?"

"No—no!" he answered quickly. "But we can't go on forever like this. I didn't think about it at first. But lately it has come over me that some sort of crisis is inevitable. Elizabeth—we can't go on like this indefinitely. It's —it's impossible."

"Well—what can we do?" she asked him during the pause that followed his declaration.

"There's divorce," he said. "I've thought

about it; but it is not easy to obtain in New York."

"Isn't there some other way?" she inquired. "It's called by some other name—annulment—that's it."

"Yes; but you have to have grounds, you know. And I don't see how there could be any annulment of your marriage."

Elizabeth thought deeply for a moment before she answered. And then she said slowly—

"I don't believe you understand. You see, except in name I have never been Ralph's wife."

Clifton heard the words with delight. And yet he could scarcely believe them.

"You—you mean," he stammered, "that you have simply taken his name? And that there's no more of a marriage between you two than there would have been if—if you had left him immediately after the ceremony?" He was watching her breathlessly now.

"Exactly," she said.

Clifton continued to stare at her wonderingly.

"But why?" he asked. "Is it for any reason that we could use against Dunham?"

"I don't know about that," she replied. "I know nothing about legal matters—least of all the divorce laws."

"Tell me what you can," he urged. "Why is it that—that your marriage has never been consummated?"

Elizabeth hesitated a little before replying. She did not know precisely how to tell him.

"I'm afraid it's all because of a misunderstanding on my part," she acknowledged at last. "I didn't want to marry Ralph in the first place. But father and mother both urged me to do it. And when I told mother that I—I didn't care for him in that sort of way—that I couldn't—she did not quite know what I meant. And she told me that it would be all right. And then, when I explained to Ralph, when he asked me to marry him, he misunderstood too. So it's all been a dreadful mistake."

"I see," Clifton said slowly. "Unfortunately, however, it's not the sort of thing that

would help you to free yourself." He pondered for a time upon the strange situation. "How about your husband?" he asked then. "Wouldn't he be willing to have the marriage annulled? *He* has grounds for petitioning for an annulment, I should say."

Elizabeth shook her head despairingly.

"I've asked him already," she said. "But he says that so long as I'm getting the sort of marriage that I stipulated for he sees no reason why I should complain—why I should want to leave him. I think—" she added, "I think he hopes that perhaps, sometime, I may feel differently toward him."

Clifton was surprised to find himself pitying Dunham in his heart. "Poor fellow!" he said to himself. He had felt qualms of jealousy whenever he had seen Elizabeth with her husband. But now he could afford to be compassionate—now that he knew the truth.

V

They were silent for a few moments. Then

Elizabeth began to undo the buttons of her gloves. Clifton put out his hand and reached over her far enough to undo the buttons of her left-hand glove. Then, raising the hand quickly to his lips, he kissed it.

His lips were burning, and she shivered.

"Don't," she said hoarsely.

"All right." He was still holding Elizabeth's left hand, and she felt that his own were trembling. A horrible impulse urged her to turn towards him, to put her right hand where her left was, to meet his eyes.

But she knew she must not do this. She fought with herself, half frightened, half angry.

"You had better go away," she said.

Her voice sounded faint and weak. She felt his grasp growing tighter on the hand he held.

"Why?"

She did not at once answer.

A thousand reasons for his leaving her were ready in her brain, and one strong above all that she did not dare to utter.

"Why must I go?" he repeated passionately.

She tried to draw her hand away, but it seemed as if all the strength had gone out of her. She felt like a reed, a wisp of hay, a feather, anything that is without the power of resistance, of standing upright.

It was he who spoke next, and his voice was changed. It seemed to be broken and hoarse, but with something in every tone that went straight down to Elizabeth's heart, making her ready to yield to him, to let him stay, as he asked to do.

But yet she knew that she must not, that she dared not.

"Why may I not stay? Your old Craig, eh, little girl?"

She wanted to scold him for speaking to her in that way, for making her feel as she was feeling.

He was a man; he knew so much more than she; surely he must know what he was doing to her, how he was melting down principles that ought to be hard and strong, and making her forget what she ought to remember!

For a moment her hand rested trembling in his, and it was as much as she could do not to let her fingers curl round his, affectionately, convulsively.

Then she recovered some of her self-command, and tried to laugh.

"Old Craig ought to see that I'm tired, and that the kindest thing he could do would be to leave me to rest a little, since I shall certainly have to be with my guests again after dinner. And if I have to go without any rest first, I shall lose all that magnificent reputation for good looks which old Craig himself had been the first to assure me I've got," she said.

"Well, can't you rest with me in the room? Let me help you off with your things. Of course, you can't rest in all that finery. But you can change into your tea-gown and be as lazy as you like."

"No, I can't. It's all fastened up the back."

"Let me unfasten it for you. I'm a capital lady's maid."

"No."

"Why not? Do you think I'm not clever enough?"

"No, of course not. But some one might come in and think it odd I should let you do it."

"Well, somebody has to do it. Didn't you tell me your maid had just left?"

"Yes. But the chambermaid comes when I ring."

"Well, ring for her now. Anything rather than that I should be turned out."

"But you'd better go, Craig, before Ralph comes."

"Oh, he won't say a word. I bet you he'll be as meek as a lamb to-day."

"But I *want* you to go!" The truth was, though she would not for the world have told him so, that she had suddenly grown afraid of herself, afraid of him, and conscious that, if she were to let herself go ever so little, she should break down into silliness, into confidences which she ought not to make, into confession that she was unhappy and lonely.

Lonely! Yes, that was what she felt. And somehow this loneliness seemed worse when Craig was there than when she was alone. They were getting into an emotional state which she dreaded to encourage. And it was strange to think back to the time when she would just have cried, and have let Clifton dry her eyes and tell her not to be a goose.

Elizabeth began to be angry with him for not understanding, or rather for pretending not to understand.

She tapped her foot impatiently on the floor and sat up on the settee, trying to drag her hand away from him. But he merely slid round the end and laughed at her.

"You did want me to take you for walks, now didn't you?"

"Walks. Yes, that's different. I never asked you to come and tease me like this."

"Do you mean that I'm never to come and see you except formally?"

"Oh, don't be silly. No. I only mean that I really, really want to be alone now."

"All right. Give me a kiss, and I'll go at once."

He was close to her. For one moment she was inclined to let him kiss her, and to kiss him back. But the next she sprang up with a laugh, and told him he was absurd, and that he must go away at once and not tease her any more.

Then he caught her and kissed her against her will. Oh, yes, it was against her will, though she didn't try to get away. She couldn't. She felt as if she were paralyzed, and yet as if she were glad not to be able to get away.

Suddenly she released herself—so suddenly that she almost fell to the floor.

"How could you?" she said in a whisper. "You have no right—"

"No right to love you? Why not? Who has a better right than I? Elizabeth, don't you want me to love you, child? You look so lonely, so helpless, it makes my heart bleed to see you!"

She could only repeat the same words:

"You have no right, no right. I've done nothing to make you think of me like that."

"I think of you as a martyr, nothing less, Elizabeth. You have been sacrificed to other people's needs."

"Nonsense. I'm not a martyr. But if I were that's no reason why you should treat me as if I were unworthy of respect."

"Elizabeth, how can you say such things!"

"I say it because it's true. You know so much that you ought to treat me beautifully!"

She burst into tears and threw herself upon the sofa, and Clifton, very penitent and gentle, stood near her and begged to be forgiven.

"Don't cry, Elizabeth; you make me feel such a brute," he said. "Indeed I didn't mean to make you cry. Why should you cry about it? Why should you be angry with me for loving you, for being mad when I see you thrown away?"

She sat up suddenly, drying her eyes.

"I'm angry," she said, "because you seem to think it doesn't matter how you treat me now."

"Come, Elizabeth, my darling, that isn't fair."

"And don't call me darling. You never dared to before."

He said nothing for a minute, and she sat sobbing quietly. Then he bent down and laid one hand on the end of the sofa, and asked in a low voice:

"Shall I go away, then?"

She bowed her head without saying anything. But he did not go at once. So presently she looked up and saw him looking, oh, so sorry and so kind and so handsome and—well, just old Craig! And as she looked up he turned to go away.

Perhaps it was just a trick on his part and that he didn't mean to go. But to see him turn away from her was more than Elizabeth could bear.

"Craig, don't go! Don't go like that," she said.

He came back quietly, so as not to frighten

her, and sat down beside her on the sofa, and held one hand while with the other she kept on mopping her poor red eyes.

"You must go," she said at last. And she tried to get up from the sofa. Clifton tried to pull her down again. She stood for a moment with his hands round her, anxious not to let him see how frightened she was. And all the while she knew that she was even more afraid of herself than she was of him, as his earnest, passionate face bent over her and two burning eyes looked straight down into her own, while her very soul seemed to thrill and quiver and leap to meet them.

"Sit down," said he peremptorily.

By the tone he was taking, Elizabeth knew that she must show fight without delay.

"No, I'm not going to sit down again. I'm going to turn you out."

"You're not. I won't go."

"Nonsense. You must."

He jumped up and put his arm round her, while he took her chin in his hand and looked

down into her eyes with that look which would have made her so passionately happy in the old days when she was free.

Now it made her shudder. And she struggled to get away, not looking at him.

"Let me go," she said hoarsely.

"No, no. I won't. I can't. Elizabeth, you love me, don't you, don't you?"

She shook her head, fighting with him.

"No, no, no, I don't love you," she said. "I'm ashamed to find that you are not worthy of my love."

"Little girl, don't say that. Do you think I would want you to fail in your duty, to break your vows? Do you think I would ask you to love me if happiness were possible for you in any other way?"

"I know you have no right to speak to me like this; no right, no right," she said. "You must let me go. You make me hate you, hate you as much as I hate my husband."

"Elizabeth, you don't mean it. You don't love him and you love me. Where's the sense,

child, of sending me away, of fighting with your own heart? If you were married to a man you could respect, even if you couldn't love him, it would be different. But you know as well as I do that he's an animal, a brute; that to talk of keeping your faith to him is an absurdity. Come, Elizabeth, little Elizabeth, don't you trust me? Don't you know that I can make you happy?"

"No, no, no; I won't hear; I won't listen."

"Yes, you will. Don't be frightened. Don't pretend to be cold. I know better. Elizabeth, I love you, I love you. The sight of you makes me tremble like a leaf. I think of you all day long. I dream of you all night. Oh, Elizabeth, don't send me away. You wouldn't make me unhappy, would you?"

With all the love and all the longing that was surging up in her heart, she felt that it was contemptible of him to play upon her feelings at such a time, when she was broken, heart-sore, feeling deserted and desolate. And yet she had not the heart or the strength to speak harshly,

firmly, to send him away with indignant looks and flashing eyes and the airs of a tragedy queen.

She could only try feebly to release herself, keeping her head turned away for fear he should force her lips to meet his and her eyes to look into his eyes.

"It isn't right, it isn't right—of you. Go away."

That was all she could say, and she said it in such a silly, hoarse whisper, that it was more like the complaint of a tired child than the outraged dignity of an offended married woman.

But perhaps it was the best way to meet him, because it made him ashamed to be struggling with such a feeble sort of creature, and also it made him see that she meant what she said. If she had put on airs of haughty indignation he would have known that they were only put on, and he might perhaps have beaten them down and laughed her out of them, and—well, then, there is no knowing what might have hap-

pened, broken and wretched and deserted as she was.

As it was, Clifton seemed disconcerted, and for a moment he relaxed his hold, and Elizabeth ran to the door, just turning to whisper:

"Good-by."

CHAPTER XV

A HELPING HAND

I

At Newport Elizabeth met an old acquaintance —the Rev. Thomas Cartwright, who had performed her marriage ceremony. The Homers, with whom she was staying, had invited the clergyman to spend a few days with them. Elizabeth had not known that he was coming and it was with genuine delight that she found him browsing among the books alone in the library.

She held out her hand and he came forward and took it. And the next instant her feelings underwent a sudden change. For his face, which could express so much, was full of a grave kindness, and pity too; and all at once Elizabeth remembered that she had been crying and that her face must show it. And she was em-

barrassed and disturbed. The tears came to her eyes again.

He still held her hand and she was sensible that for a moment her fingers seemed to tighten around his, as if she knew that in her wretchedness she had at last found a friend and was reluctant to let him go. The next minute she had recovered herself; and she explained that seeing an old friend again unexpectedly was such a surprise and pleasure that it had quite overwhelmed her.

The minister looked gravely at her again. There were lines in his face—lines which often gave him an appearance of sadness when his face was in repose. But they vanished as his face lighted up when he spoke. Elizabeth thought, as she regarded him, that his eyes were the kindest she had ever seen. He had always been kind to her, since her earliest recollections. Often he appeared quite grave, and sometimes even somewhat stern, but yet so kind always that he made her feel that he was the very person she should go to in any difficulty.

Her heart went out to him, wracked as she was, and torn by doubts and fears. It seemed to her all at once that just to know that he was in the world made her feel calmer, more comfortable. She felt that it would be easy to go straight to him and tell him everything—vastly easier than to make a confidant of her father or her mother, or indeed anybody else. She told herself, as she looked at him affectionately, that he was the very ideal of what a clergyman ought to be, but what so few seemed—someone to put trust in.

It was a boon, a blessing to her, to find him there, when she had been feeling that there was nobody in the world in whom she could confide. When she told him how pleased she was to see him he did not smirk, or say that he felt flattered, as everybody had seemed to do since her marriage. Wealth was not included in Thomas Cartwright's objects of worship. He merely looked her full in the face, gravely and sternly too. But Elizabeth knew that the sternness was not meant for her.

II

She told him all. There in the somber stillness of the unfrequented library Elizabeth unburdened her soul of its dragging weight of sorrow and bitterness and perplexity.

He heard her through to the very end. And when she had quite finished he said in a low voice—

"It's a bad business. But we must make the best of it," he continued. "You are a brave girl, to tell me these things, and we must see that your future is assured. Thank God! you came to me with your troubles. It's what we're for, we ministers—to help the weary and heavy-laden. Your troubles are not insurmountable, my child. They are all too common in this age. But unfortunately too many people blunder in the solution of their difficulties."

Elizabeth jumped up, seized with a sudden impulse, and leaning upon the table behind which he sat she looked across at him and asked passionately—

"What did he marry me for, Mr. Cartwright?"

In the midst of his gravity and sternness he looked at her and smiled, almost as if she had said something amusing.

"I don't think any one would find any difficulty in ascribing a reason for a man's wishing to marry you, my dear," he said, so quietly that although she knew what he meant, it scarcely sounded like the flattering speech it was.

"I mean," she said, "I should think a different type of woman would have appealed to him—a woman who was gayer, who was less reserved than I, someone who was less sensitive and oh! quite a different person altogether from me; someone he would not find boring, as I know I have been from the time we were married. Really, I don't think I'm at all the sort of woman he could have expected to live with comfortably. And he knew that I did not love him. He was older—vastly more experienced. He should have known, he must have

known, that without love—passionate love—real marriage is impossible."

The Rev. Thomas Cartwright sat upright suddenly in his chair.

"Ah! that's the common mistake!" he exclaimed. "It is one of the great fallacies that it is passion that consecrates the union of a man and a woman. If it were true that it did, there would be fewer successful marriages than there are in the world. There are very few *grande passions.* It is a thing that comes to but few. Many think they are experiencing it, to discover their error quickly. What they mistake for an enduring flame is likely to die as quickly as it grew."

Elizabeth was puzzled.

"But love—real love—should be the only basis of marriage, don't you think?" she asked him.

"Love? Hm . . . Love, dear young lady, is a much overworked commodity. There are many erroneous ideas concerning it. Most of

them have been inculcated by writers of fiction —the authors of novels, and plays too—who find in love the easiest capital out of which to forge their so-called masterpieces. A struggling literary man discovered a long time ago that it pleased the public mightily to be told that love was sufficient excuse for almost any course of action his ingenuity might devise. And so many other writers have exploited his idea in various ways that one can't pick up a newspaper to-day without being confronted with some 'affinity' story. The very common use of the vulgar term 'affinity' shows the general attitude upon the subject. The kernel around which the majority of popular novels—the much-vaunted 'best-sellers'—are constructed is *'Love is its own law.'* It's not only a ridiculous theory—it's absolutely vicious.

"I didn't come to Newport expecting to read a sermon," he told her with a smile. "And if I do preach a little private one to you, you'll understand, I hope, that it's intended not as a

reproach but a help. And it will be the sort of sermon, I'm sorry to say, that is seldom or never heard from the pulpit—more's the pity."

As Cartwright paused Elizabeth turned her eager face toward his.

"Oh, I know that you want to help me," she said. "I know that you're wise, and kind, and good. If—if I could only have had you to guide me in the beginning I'm sure all this trouble would never have come to me."

"My dear—none of us is omniscient," he said gently. "What's done is done. And about all we seem to be able to do in our poor human way is to try to rectify our mistakes after we have made them. The unfortunate thing about life is that we are so little able to profit by such wisdom as comes from the experience of others' long years of living. Each of us has to learn the lesson anew. All my own life, for instance, has been passed in learning, painfully—and often sorrowfully—what hosts of men must have learned before me. Why can not such knowledge be handed down in some way to the grow-

ing generations? It's the saddest thing I know —the most maddening, too—that we spend the greater part of our time on this earth learning how to live in it. And by the time we have really discovered something definite of life's mysteries, then it's usually too late to turn our knowledge to account. We're old then. Our course is run. And because we have arrived at conclusions that do not fit in with the ideas of the young, whom we would help during the few years that remain to us, we're branded as dotards, out of step with the times, out of sympathy with youth." In the Rev. Thomas Cartwright's eyes there glowed an unaccustomed fire. It struck Elizabeth that he was strangely stirred by the thoughts that his words expressed.

III

"My child," he went on, "I'll tell you—as I've told no one before—the things that I have passed my life in learning. I've tried to tell them before, but no one would listen to them.

Some day perhaps some second John the Baptist will emerge from the wilderness of false standards, mistaken ideals, and mushy sentimentality that the world is wandering through and will proclaim the truth in flaming words. He will be a true prophet, inspired and sent by God to enlighten humanity. But the time is not yet come. Long ago I found that I was not the man to bear the message. You see," he said, turning to her sadly, "I'm just a weak, impotent mortal. My impress upon the world is infinitesimal. I can only do what I can in my own little, humble way. It has often been borne in upon me that my life was wasted—spent in vain in the futile pursuit of ministering to a fashionable parish to which I have never been able to drive home a single great truth. But if I can help you—if I can guide just one tortured soul out of the darkness into the light—I shall feel wondrously blessed, for the Lord will have permitted me to accomplish a great thing."

Tears glistened in his eyes now, but with an effort he pulled himself together and continued.

"We think we live in an enlightened age; while in reality we're groping about in a maze of misinformation. To begin with, our theories of conduct for some hundreds of years have been molded by imaginative writers whose aim has been, not the dissemination of truth, but the tickling of the fancy of their readers. These dramatists and novelists have had to produce works that the public liked—else they starved. Molière began it, by the exalting of heroes and heroines who set the gratification of passion above all else—above family honor, civic duty, and patriotism.

"Marriage is bound up inextricably with the welfare of society—its safety and honor. Marriage is primarily a social act. It is individual, of necessity, and religious as well. But we must never forget that its morality is first of all a social morality, because it so vitally concerns social existence.

"These are generalizations, it is true, but they are necessary to a real understanding of your own problem. I think you will agree with

me when I say that young people form their ideas of marriage from plays and novels, and not from the teachings of ethical writers—least of all from what could be the great predominant teacher of Christian ethics—the Church. For the Church, with a wealth of material upon which to base its theories, is terribly dumb upon this vital question.

"The great obstacle to a clear understanding of marriage is found in the fact that we are living in a literary age. Our popular writers ascribe as the sole basis of marriage what they term love—a love which is nothing more or less than eroticism. And the appalling error of their teaching lies in the fact that they ignore the truth that the only sort of love that consecrates marriage possesses a moral nature and has a distinct reference to a moral society which surrounds it. It is concerned with social facts —the welfare of the state.

"But this moral kind of love is a thing which takes into account greater considerations than merely the affections of the individual, and is a

very different thing from the natural and purely selfish love with which the pages of the popular novels reek. Almost every 'successful' play or novel fairly stuffs the public with its vicious assumption that the ideal love is one consisting of mutual passion. The great bulk of literary and dramatic work nowadays turns upon such subjects as married infidelity and heartbreak. And the public likes it—alas! And it files out of the theater or lays down its book at midnight filled to overflowing with the contemplation of the petty, sensuous, selfish emotions of the cheap puppets created by the authors' brains. There's no thought of society in all this sentimentality. There's no recognition that the unit of society is the family; and that the destruction of everyone of those units is a blow—a vicious, immoral onslaught—upon the social structure.

"Marriage, as it should exist if it is to work for the good of the race—which is its only logical excuse for being—marriage concerns much more than the affections of the parties thereto.

Bound up in the marriage of every two who enter into that solemn contract is the welfare of the community. But as we observe the concrete examples of marriage that are everywhere about us we see all the emphasis placed upon the liberty of the contracting parties. The world has adopted the view that marriage is a private affair—than which no view could be more erroneous. It is much more than private; it is social: for in it is wrapped the fate of the family. It is astonishing that society permits such ignorance of that fact to prevail. It is amazing that mutual passion is commonly held to be the only factor to be considered in the union of a man and a woman. In the eyes of the world the marriage service is but a mumbling of promises which the makers feel at liberty to disregard at will.

"Now there must be a reason for the currency of such views. What has been the influence that has so warped the common sense—not to say the morality—of the public? The answer is again, vicious literature; for it promulgates the views

that are best adapted to the purposes of the money-grubbing writer. Moral, conscientious, sane-minded people, living in righteous wedlock, do not lend themselves to the construction of sensational plots and erotic episodes. Put into books, or behind the footlights, they make but poor, humdrum stories and plays."

IV

The minister's words brought little solace to Elizabeth Dunham. Where was the solution to her problem? If it lay in her passive acceptance of his theories, then she faced the obligation of continuing to live with her husband, and upon a decidedly different basis from that which had existed between her and Ralph up to that time.

Cartwright guessed something of her thoughts and he waited for the questions which he felt sure must follow his statements.

"What you say is quite true, I suppose," Elizabeth said at last. "But it's so easy to accept such views as applied to the rest of the

world—and so hard to accept them as applied to oneself. I may be very wrong—terribly wicked—but even for the sake of society I'm sure I cannot continue to remain Ralph's wife. And if I find it impossible to do that, how much more abhorrent would it be to me to enter into a life with him which would conform to your ideal of a moral marriage? How can you think it possible for me to—to take up my share in a marriage which would constitute a unit such as you talk about—a family? For that would mean—that I would have to live my life under conditions that would be revolting to me. No! No! I never could do it—I'm sure. Is there no other way? There must be—there must be!"

She was only a woman, after all—emotional, and hysterical as well. And Thomas Cartwright reflected that he must not expect her to yield up her instinctive impulses without a struggle, if indeed she relinquished them at all. But she had a soul worth saving; and he did not lose heart. His was the obligation to save it;

he owed the duty to himself—to her—to the Church—to the Master.

"My dear," he said gently, "there is a positive ideal of marriage. And having made your marriage before God it is incumbent upon you, as far as it may be in your power, to attain that ideal. In Malachi the purpose of marriage is declared to be the sowing of the Godly seed, which is simply another way of saying that marriages should be fruitful—that they should be productive of righteous children and so conducive to a better race.

"There is the way blazed for you," he said. And he breathed a silent prayer that she would follow the path, difficult though it might be.

"Ah!" Elizabeth cried—"it's cruel—cruel! Why should I be punished for my blind ignorance? If I've lost my way, is there no other road I can take? No other course that will lead me out of this terrible maze? "

"No other path that you can take and look your Maker in the face," he told her, though it hurt him to see her suffer so.

"But I should be unhappy—you don't know how unhappy I'd be! You're a man and you can't understand. I should be miserable—wretched! My life would be one continual torment of soul."

She dropped her face upon the table and fell into a fit of violent weeping. Great sobs shook her shoulders; in both mind and body she was wracked by her mingled grief and hopelessness.

"I thought that being married meant being happy," she said at last, after the paroxysm had passed. "Perhaps it does, for others; but for me marriage has meant nothing but unhappiness."

"Don't feel that there's no hope," he said, in an attempt to hearten her. "It's a very foolish mistake that most people make to think that when they are married they are going to live happily ever after. Very, very few individuals are so constituted that they can live with any other person upon the intimate terms that marriage necessitates without discovering that the

state of matrimony is not a bed of thornless roses. Even the most successful—the ideal—marriage, requires the passage of time, of years, —yes, of a lifetime, to ripen as nearly into perfection as may be possible. You see, it is a question of heart-culture, and just as the cultivation of any living, growing thing is a matter of effort, involving labor and difficulty, so does even the ideal marriage necessitate careful nurture which may—and probably will—require both pain and sacrifice.

"Nor is the ideal marriage by any means free from friction. When the first storm bursts —in the shape of the first difference or quarrel —most young couples think that the sky has fallen. And they often go on through life, looking upon every petty disagreement or misunderstanding as a tragedy. That, of course, is an absurd way to regard what is generally but a trivial and momentary friction, the result often of nothing more æsthetic than an attack of indigestion."

Elizabeth's eyes opened wide in astonishment

as she heard the Rev. Thomas Cartwright's unexpected information as to happiness in marriage.

"I know," he said, observing her surprise. "I know that that is not what you had thought could exist when a man and woman were wisely mated. I think that nearly all young married people harbor the same misunderstanding of the true facts. And marrying as they do with the mistaken belief that they are entering upon a perpetual billing and cooing, when they find that they are not absolutely happy—that there are difficulties to be overcome, attended by sorrow and pain—their first impulse is to rush into the divorce courts."

Elizabeth was conscious of a hot flush of guilt which overspread her cheeks as she listened to the wise old man's words. It was clear that he had observed much during his lifetime—far more than she would have suspected. But did all his advice really apply to her? Upon second thought it seemed to her that he had all the time been shooting over the mark. *She did*

not love her husband! There was the crux of the whole situation. It was all very well for Mr. Cartwright to tell her that a husband and wife must expect friction of a trivial sort, and overcome it with patience and forbearance; but her good old friend had in mind people who were at least more or less in love with each other. And how different was the case of her and Ralph! She did not love him! There lay the difficulty of applying the old minister's advice to her own problem. She did not love her husband. That saving grace was lacking; and to her mind, love being absent, any attempt to rearrange her life with Ralph was futile.

V

"I'm afraid you don't understand," she told Cartwright. "You see, I don't love my husband. I dare say it was very wrong of me to marry him; but I do not seem to have comprehended what I was doing. And I was honest. I told him I did not love him. So now it seems to me that the only thing we can do is to part. If—

if I cared for him I could do the thing that you ask of me—or appear to expect of me. But I don't love him and I can never go on."

Cartwright, however, was undismayed by her immense conviction.

"Perhaps I understand better than you think," he said softly. "Let us hope I do, at least. You say that you do not love your husband, and that not loving him you feel that divorce is necessary. That is your conviction. But I hope that I may be able to help you to change your opinion. It has never occurred to you, probably, any more than it has to most unhappily married people who have either entered upon matrimony with no affection for the other contracting party, or who, having married with the mistaken idea that they have cherished a *grande passion,* have discovered that they ceased to love—it has never occurred either to them or to you that the affections may be controlled. That is not the popular view—the literary view—but it is none the less correct."

To Elizabeth it was a startling theory, that one might at will love where one did not. And it was a theory which at once struck her as highly absurd and absolutely impracticable.

"You mean—that I can learn to love my husband?" she asked, her voice full of the doubt which she felt so strongly.

"Precisely. The thing may be accomplished, impossible as it may appear upon the face of it. The process is of a two-fold nature—positive and negative. As for the negative means—you will agree with me, I think, that one can at least remove oneself from such influences as tend to divert his affections from their legitimate object. A woman need not listen to the importunities of a lover, so-called. She need not permit his advances or attentions. She need not even see him. And by breaking off all relations with him she will have accomplished the first great step toward the proper and moral rehabilitation of her affections."

She knew what he meant. He meant that she must break with Craig. Never to see his eager,

solicitous eyes; never to hear his voice, vibrant with words of love and adoration; never to feel the sympathetic touch of his hand upon hers; never again to open a longed-for letter from him and thrill under the fervor of its message! Could she do it? Could she deliberately deny herself the things which were as the breath of life to her? Her heart sank at the mere contemplation of the prospect.

"That is the first step for you, my child. And having taken it you will have placed yourself in a position to undertake the positive acts which in the end will bring you happiness, as we know it on this earth. Christ said—*'Love ye your enemies.'* What is that, I ask, but a command to be master of our affections? He knew in His divine wisdom that the feat was possible of attainment. It's quite in accord with what we know nowadays of psychology. Having given the command, Our Lord went further and laid out a definite course of action to be followed: for did He not say, *'Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you,*

and pray for them that despitefully use you'? In those few words lie the precept that I would have you follow, in principle. Their meaning, translated into every-day language, is this: that kindly acts give rise to kindly feelings toward their recipient. Any student of psychology will tell you that repeated actions constitute training. A thing performed often enough becomes a habit. Therefore if we conduct ourselves consistently in a loving way towards others, in the course of time love for those others will be instilled in us. Like begets like. Deeds of loving kindness breed love in their doer.

"This is not my advice, my dear. It is Christ's teaching. Only follow it and I am sure you will be wondrously repaid. For the time will come when you will render heartfelt thanks unto Him, because you will love your husband. And loving him, it will be your happiness to be a helpmeet for him, to honor and cherish him so long as you both live."

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE DARK WATCHES

I

When he left town upon the *Nomad,* Dunham had hoped to gain some respite from the burden of sorrow which had attached itself like some incubus to his shoulders. In the fresh breezes of the New England coast he had looked for rejuvenation; and he had thought with an immense longing of the nights, when if he could not sleep, he might at least lie in a deck-chair beneath the sky and look out upon the peace of the moon-kissed water as the yacht lay at anchor in some quiet harbor.

But except for one night even that boon was denied him. They had scarcely left the swell off New London behind them when the wireless operator picked up a message which told Dunham that his presence was required in New

York. So the next morning the yacht's nose would be turned back toward the metropolis.

Dunham was conscious of an unconquerable shrinking from the business that demanded his attention. He had lost his zest for the game which of old had always had such a fascination for him. Never since his return from his honeymoon had he recovered his grip upon his affairs. His interest no longer lay in the accumulation of wealth—a proceeding which now palled upon him unspeakably. All his thoughts centered irrevocably about a slip of a girl. Nothing on earth except her could awaken his least concern. And alas! she cared less than nothing for him.

A fortnight had passed since he last saw Elizabeth. It was at The Knolls, memorable to him as the place where his hopes had risen, only to die quickly when he discovered that she was still obviously wretched with him.

At last Dunham had come to despair utterly of ever being anything more to her than a hindrance to her happiness. She had been trapped

into marriage and he was the drag attached to the trap. She strained away from the hateful clog as far as the chains of matrimony allowed. But she knew that he was always there; she knew that she could not escape.

Such thoughts as these were ever-present in his mind. They drove all else completely out of his head. He was melancholy. And a morbid conviction of his uselessness fixed itself upon him like an obsession. To his disordered vision all his efforts in life seemed vain. He could not convince himself that he had ever been of any benefit to the world. He told himself again and again that if only he could make Elizabeth happy he would have accomplished an immense thing—something which would have justified his existence. But now he could discern no reason for his being.

II

At night, as he stood alone at the rail of the *Nomad* and looked down upon the face of the water a sudden longing came over him to drop

into the gently heaving swell. The sea was like a cradle, rocked by some invisible hand; and he felt that it offered him incomparable rest. Rest! rest! that was what he wanted now. And this would be a perfect rest, for it would be without an end. It was the only logical solution of his difficulties. It would permit Elizabeth to find happiness where she would; and of late Dunham had little doubt that Elizabeth could be happy with someone—some other more fortunate man than he. He had noticed that Craig Clifton was invariably included among guests invited to The Knolls and he could not but remark that Elizabeth and the young lawyer were often together. Even to Dunham it seemed strange that the fact bred no resentment in his heart. It only made him sadder—only confirmed his feeling of hopelessness.

He straightened up and looked about him. There was no one near. His guests were all asleep in their state-rooms and none of the night-watch was in sight. He leaned over the rail again and bent nearer the water. The sea

seemed to call to him—"Come—come! I will take you gently to my bosom and lull you into peaceful sleep. Come—come!"

The temptation to obey almost overpowered him. Something within him—some deeply-rooted instinct of self-preservation—made his hands close upon the rail in a desperate grip. And still he felt an enormous longing to slip stealthily into the lapping swell. In a few moments it would all be over. It was such a simple thing to do. A six-foot drop and the deed would be accomplished.

What would people say of him? They would call him a coward, just as he had called other men cowards who had chosen that way of ending their troubles. He winced at the thought. And slowly he drew back from the yacht's side. No! that should never be said of him. He shivered as he realized how near he had been to self-destruction. And in the stillness he breathed a prayer—he who never prayed—he breathed a prayer of thanks to the Almighty because he had seen in time.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RENUNCIATION

I

Though Craig Clifton did not know it, Elizabeth consecrated to him a long night of memories and tears. Many times she wavered in her decision; but when the gray dawn stole in at her windows it discovered her asleep at last, resigned to the stern duty that Thomas Cartwright had shown her to be hers.

In just one respect she had not been able to accept the line of conduct he had urged upon her. He had admonished her not to see Craig again—a denial which she found impossible to impose upon herself. She felt that she must meet him once more. She had tried to write him of her determination, and had given up the task as utterly hopeless. Her thoughts would not mold themselves into words which she could

set down on paper. Yes! she must see Craig and break the news to him as best she could.

Accordingly Elizabeth left Newport that very morning, having first sent her lover a message which asked him to meet her when she should reach New York.

Clifton had cajoled the gate-guard in the station to let him pass through to the train-shed, and there he met her, unsuspecting, eager, and smiling, almost as soon as she stepped from the car. He insisted upon taking her to one of the big Fifth Avenue restaurants for tea and Elizabeth yielded to his urging. They found the hotel, as they expected, virtually deserted, for at that season the patrons of all the fashionable places of refreshment were scattered to the four corners of the earth, far away from the depressing heat of New York in summer.

He found Elizabeth strangely silent. And yet she would not tell him the reason for her quietness. Deserted as the big room was, except for themselves and a few waiters hovering here and there in the background, she felt that it was still

no place for her to tell him of her decision.

"Take me home, please," she said, when she had finished the iced beverage which Clifton had ordered for her. The dainty confections which he had bade the waiter bring lay untouched before her. Food was the last thing she had any desire for.

"Are you ill?" Clifton asked solicitously, as he put her thin silk coat about her shoulders.

"No—not ill. Just tired!" she told him. She could not tell him the truth—yet. She could not tell him of the dull ache in her heart, of the hopelessness which weighed her down with its crushing load.

II

Clifton's car carried them quickly to the Dunhams' town-house. The big stone mansion presented a forbiddingly deserted appearance as they climbed the steps; but there were servants there, for Dunham never knew when he would be summoned back to New York by some sudden call of business.

"Is Mr. Dunham in town?" Elizabeth asked the man who opened the door.

"No, Mrs. Dunham, he went away on the *Nomad* last night and said he did not expect to return until next week."

She gave the servant her wraps and with Clifton went on into the library.

At last they were alone. Clifton looked at her tenderly.

"My darling!" he said softly. "Do you know that you are the most glorious being in all this wonderful world?"

She smiled at him wistfully. There was gladness in her face, for the moment, for she saw that her lover had forgotten in that moment the very existence on earth of any except themselves. She knew that his infatuation for her had immediately crowded out all thought of her husband and the unconventional situation in which they were placed. She wished that he might never be brought back to the stern realities that faced them.

"You're troubled—" Craig whispered, as

though he half read her thoughts. "I realize often that things are difficult for you. But when I am with you I forget everything—except that we love each other. With you filling my mind and heart there's no room left for troubles."

"But they exist, Craig. All the forgetting we can do doesn't make them any the less," she told him sadly. "I've been thinking about them—more than you know."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry that you are unhappy. But you're bound to be worried and downhearted so long as things continue as they are now. Why not change everything? Why not leave Dunham? Neither of you is happy now, and I'm convinced that you would be doing him no unkindness—no wrong—if you would break away from this irksome yoke and come to me."

For a short space they stood in silence. Clifton felt with an all-conquering conviction that she was rightfully his. He felt it was his indefeasible privilege always to be near her and

comfort her, and to shield her from whatever harm might threaten.

"My beautiful Love," he said turning to her gently, "we belong to each other. You are all mine, and I am wholly yours. This wonderful bond that brings us together is too strong for us to ignore."

She shook her head.

"Craig—" she answered slowly—"we must part. We must forget each other. I've thought it all out—and I'm convinced."

He looked at her in astonishment.

"Do you think I could go away from you?" he exclaimed—"knowing that you love me, knowing that I'd be leaving you to a wretched existence? No! no! You're young, and glorious and vital! And yet I could more easily see you dead than relinquish you to the horror of that living death to which your marriage with Dunham would condemn you."

"Ah, Craig—try to forget all that," Elizabeth said, as she gazed long and wistfully into his troubled eyes.

"We'll forget it—yes," he answered. And a great resolve formulated itself fast within his consciousness. "We'll forget it together!" He spoke quickly, and she saw that his sinews tightened as his body quickened under the spur of his shaping thought. "You must come with me. I'll not leave you to mourn your life away. If you won't leave Dunham in any other fashion, I'll just take you! Come—come! We'll go at once! We'll go abroad—anywhere—we'll go by the next boat—to-morrow, if there's one leaving."

As his meaning impressed itself upon her, her eyes opened wide with wonder.

"Oh! you are quite mad," she cried. "It is impossible."

But Craig would not be denied.

"My dear one," he urged, "many people have done that. It is by no means an unheard-of thing. Think for a moment of what life would mean for us two together! Our world would be flooded with the light of love. And how different from the appalling darkness, the inter-

minable, drab days of torment—if we part here. I cannot—I will not leave you. I know I'm asking you to violate society's conventions. I know you'd be cut off from all the associations, every friend of your girlhood. But I am willing,—yes, glad to ask that sacrifice of you, because I'm sure you would be happy." He had taken her in his arms, as he spoke, and drew her to him masterfully.

"Let me go, please," Elizabeth murmured. And Clifton drew her gently to a near-by seat. "It's not all that, that stands in the way, Craig," she continued slowly. "Surely you must know that I care enough for you to make me glad to make such sacrifices for you. But there is just one sacrifice I cannot make. I cannot forsake my duty."

"Your duty!" Clifton exclaimed. "Your duty should not require you to devote your whole life to carrying out this farce between you and your husband. Why! you're living a lie! It's unnatural—wicked." And he looked down at her fiercely in his indignation.

"Tell me you love me—tell me!" he said with a sudden vehemence that might have made her half afraid. But she showed no fear.

"Yes, I think I love you," she said—"I—I love you, and I am afraid I shall always love you!"

She was pale, her cheeks and a glimpse of low forehead showing between the loose strands of her hair were creamily and purely pale.

To Clifton she seemed lovelier than ever. And a feeling of immense tenderness swept over him, and a passionate desire to shield her from all harm. Yes—there was no danger—no earthly peril, that he would not gladly face for her sake, because it seemed to him that he loved her as a man is destined to love just one woman out of the whole world of women.

She slipped her arm through his.

"Come!" she said, "there are some things that I—that I—must tell you." And she drew him down upon the seat beside her.

For a brief minute she said nothing—but her eyes drank in thirstily the light that burnt in

his. And Clifton was supremely happy then, as he sat there silently with this slender, fair-haired woman, who—to him—represented the happy legion of the all-desired.

"Craig!" she said at last, "I have come to tell you something that will hurt you frightfully—as it has hurt me. Oh! I know! for is not my own heart breaking? I've come—to tell you that I cannot go on like this. At last I've seen things clearly. I've been a wicked woman even to dream of happiness with you. I've forgotten my marriage vows—the promises that I made before God. That I didn't realize all they meant must make no difference. I must accept the situation. And I cannot see you again."

She buried her head upon his shoulder, as her whole body shook in the grip of her great emotion.

This was life!

III

At first Clifton was too stunned to speak. He could only hold his love as she lay in his arms, convulsively wracked by great silent, tearless sobs of grief.

He looked down at her—at first pityingly, then wonderingly, then passionately.

He had loved her! God! he had loved her so much, and planned for her, and waited for her—only for this!

It was madness, some distorted idea of conscience which love's ardor, love's unyielding demand could disperse.

He would lift her face to his and cover her lips with kisses and crush her slim, girlish form to his heart, and then all those fantastic superstitions would be dispelled. Such were the thoughts that came crowding into his brain.

"You are saying what you don't mean, my dear!" he cried. "This is just a nervous collapse. You have been under too great a strain.

Our love is too real and close a thing for you to let it go by for the sake of some mythical ghost of honor. Elizabeth! Elizabeth!" And with the last call upon her name, his arms opened and then closed more firmly around the slim grace of her girlish figure, while hungrily, eagerly, insistently his lips sought to find her own.

He would not be cheated out of the woman whom he wanted, and longed for, and loved.

"Darling! darling!" Twice he said it, then the search for her lips was over. He had found that little mouth that had so often returned the pressure of his—he would kiss her now, again and again and again—until . . .

"You will never kiss me again," she said. "These few days I have been half mad, and now I am sane—or perhaps it may be that I have been sane and now I am half mad! I don't know which way it is—I only know that I want you to forgive me!"

"Forgive you! forgive you!" said Craig gently. "My darling! there is nothing to for-

give." He patted her shoulder soothingly. "Don't feel badly," he whispered. Though there be none to hear, that is ever a lover's way. "You've been too much alone to-day," he continued. "But thank God I'll always be near you now, to comfort you when you're sad and troubled, and to rejoice with you when you're happy."

"No! no!" she answered. "That can never be, Craig. I've thought it all out, alone, and I know that if I forsook my duty I should know nothing but remorse my life long. Oh! it's hard! hard! But I was brought into the world for this purpose. It was written down in the book of life that I should marry Ralph. If I ever find happiness, it must be with him."

Craig found himself at a loss for words. For a time he could only try in his man's way to comfort her. He kissed her again and again and wished that he might have the good fortune to meet Dunham as man to man. For was not that devil the direct instrument of her torture?

How could he leave her to endure the suffering which he felt sure would be her lot? Oh! it was incredible that this was the same bright world of a short half-hour ago. Then the fresh-tinted day had helped impart to him a sensation of invigorated hope. But now a deep despair came over him.

"How can I leave you! How can I leave you!" he groaned. "And yet I cannot urge you now. I know you have been fighting this battle with yourself all day."

"Yes—yes, and all night, too!" she said sadly. "And sometimes my longing to be with you almost made me belittle every consideration except our happiness—yours and mine. But in the end I saw it all clearly. I'll always thank God that I saw in time."

He was looking at her sadly. There seemed so much of tender, sweet, beautiful womanhood being wasted here. A divine friend, a perfect wife, an ideal mother! How exquisitely she would grace any of these rôles!

But he knew now—alas! that he would play

no further part upon her stage of life. Their too short drama was almost at an end.

"Craig!" she asked, "will you always remember me?"

"Always—always—how could I ever forget you?" was his half-questioning answer.

She clung to him with all the fictitious strength of her despair.

"We must not meet each other again," she told him tearfully. "You must not venture near me. I do not know how strong I am. I dare not see you, Craig. I could never again fight as I have fought against myself. So you must be brave for both of us. You must be steadfast. No matter how clear the call to come, you must shut your ears to it.

"And, oh! Craig—don't forget me too soon! I know you will always keep a place for me in your heart; but you are young—and one day some sweet girl will help you to forget this pain. I hate the thought—and yet I would not have it otherwise."

So it was finished between those two sad young lovers.

"You must go—you must go now!" she said. "Don't make it harder for me."

And that appeal persuaded Clifton as no other could have. Make it harder for her! Did he not desire passionately to make all things easy for her! Was it not his dearest wish to anticipate her every want—and to relieve her of all her burdens? To make the rough places smooth? Should he then fail her in this one—the only—thing he could do to lessen her present anxiety?

"My dear!" he murmured, "I yield to your will. But I cannot think that we'll not meet again." And he looked at her still hopefully.

But Elizabeth felt with an immense conviction that she would never see him again.

IV

Down the Avenue Clifton rode. But all his thoughts were of his love. He had left his heart behind him. And every instant he was

being borne further and further away from that which was dearest to him.

There was something depressing in the cavern-like, deserted street, which stretched away ahead of him like some yawning gorge, with its great cliffs—in the shape of lofty buildings—hanging threateningly over him.

He wondered when he should see his Elizabeth again. For in his heart all hope was not yet dead. Optimism is too essentially a part of the philosophy of youth to be entirely stifled. It is only long experience of life that permits us to recognize defeat. Resignation comes only in the wake of many disappointments.

And to Craig Clifton this was the first intimation that man is not always master of his fate. It was his first taste of the bitterness of the inevitable.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOMING TOGETHER

I

After Clifton had left her, Elizabeth felt that she must die of grief. But she had no thought of turning back. She had determined upon her course and the way lay before her.

In the oppressive silence of the deserted mansion she went quietly about her duty—as she saw it—the removal of every visible trace of her affair with Clifton.

Alone in her boudoir she unlocked her desk and drew forth a packet of letters, Craig's letters, which she had carefully preserved. Each one she read many times. As she touched them they seemed a part of him and she felt that he was near. Except for a few small trinkets that he had given her they were the only tangible tokens she had which had come from him. One

by one she tore them relentlessly into bits, though every tear through the crisp paper was like a rending of her own heart-strings.

If she found the ordeal a painful one, how much more difficult would be the task of eradicating those more lasting—though impalpable—mementoes of the soul! She feared that the feat would be impossible. And yet she knew in her heart that it was better that she had sent Clifton away. It was hard, and it would yet be even harder—the existence that confronted her. But if she could not endure it she reflected sadly that, after all, she could not live forever.

She had nearly finished destroying the letters when, as she picked up one of the few that remained, a paper fluttered to the floor. Craig's photograph! It was just a little picture, taken by some amateur, but Elizabeth held it as if it were a priceless miniature done by some great artist. The little informal portrait brought to her a sense of intimacy with him,—it conveyed to her a feeling of his reality.

Sadly then she rent the small photograph in

twain and dropped the pieces into the basket which was now brimming with the fragments of Clifton's letters. To it were soon added the remainder of the missives and then, hastily gathering up the small remembrances that he had given her, she cast them into the mass of torn paper.

Once the thing was accomplished she breathed a sigh of relief; and ringing for a maid Elizabeth directed her to remove the basket. As the door closed behind the servant, the immense silence of the spacious room filled Elizabeth Dunham with a curious feeling of oppression. The afternoon was waning and a summer thunder-storm had overcast the sky with a pall of darkness which cut off the slanting rays of the sinking sun and transformed the big room to a place of vague shapes, of dim outlines and deep shadows. Perhaps that change worked subtly upon her overwrought nerves. At all events, she felt an eerie foreboding in the somber quiet and experienced a strange sense of loneliness. She was conscious all at once of a

great need of companionship, of the definite nearness of some human being.

II

Just before dinner Ralph Dunham pushed his doorbell and entered his house. The butler, who opened the door in answer to his summons, was not a little surprised at his master's unexpected return, though he was too well trained a servant to evidence any astonishment.

Elizabeth, too, was startled when she heard her husband's voice in the hall outside. And to her amazement it gave her an unmistakable feeling of relief to know that Ralph was there.

Such is the Almighty's method of working out His decreed order of events.

Ralph Dunham entered his bedroom with a heavy step. He was unutterably weary; and he felt terribly alone. Yet he could not think of a single soul on earth—except one—with whom he wished to be. If he could see Elizabeth—if he could but look at her, to watch the play of expression upon her sweet face and drink in her

cool beauty with his thirsty eyes he felt that he might feel refreshed. He sighed deeply as he thought of her loveliness and realized that even to regard it was torture—an exquisite agony.

The small clock upon the mantel-piece struck seven. At the sound, force of habit made him think of dinner. Where should he dine? He knew that if he went to one of his clubs he would find a few stragglers there—other unfortunates who were detained in town. He did not want to meet them. In the whole city there was no one whom he wished to see. And as he pondered upon his loneliness the desolation of the empty house weighed down upon him grievously. Was there no friend to come to his relief? No one to rescue him from himself?

Dunham was standing before a high chest—a huge, antique piece which contained many drawers. Something moved him suddenly to reach out his hand and open one of them. The impulse was like the prompting of some evil genius. Before his eyes the old-fashioned chest revealed a revolver, a wicked-looking arm which

lay there fully loaded, ready at his bidding to release its six messengers of death.

He lifted the weapon from its resting place. The stock nestled closely in his palm and his fingers closed about it in an answering caress. Here was a friend! Here was a friend with a remedy for his despondency. He looked down curiously at the sleek blueness of the revolver. The room was very still, and a sudden desire came to him to interrupt the silence with a shot. Slowly he raised the weapon and placed the barrel to his head. He held the muzzle close against his hot skin while his finger curled knowingly about the trigger. One quick pull and the thing would be accomplished! He wondered if he would hear the report. Or would the bullet, crashing into his brain, silence his ears even before the roar of the explosion reached them?

There was something seductively suggestive of repose in the cold steel pressing against his temple. Just one slight pull and that repose would be his! No one could take it from him. He could see the doctors bending over him and

listening for his heart-beat, listening in vain. He could smell the choking fumes of the powder in the room. He could hear the newsboys crying their extras in the streets outside—*"All about Ralph Dunham! Suicide! Suicide! Extra! Extra!"*

He thought of the flurry in the market the next morning. There would be a quick drop in the Dunham stocks, so-called. Some people would be ruined. But after a little things would readjust themselves and he reflected bitterly that the world would go on as before. It would go on as if he had never lived in it.

What was that? He started suddenly. A tap on his door? He dropped the revolver into its receptacle and shut the drawer with a slam.

"Well?" he called.

The door opened softly. It was a servant, who first begged his pardon for disturbing him, and then told him that Mrs. Dunham was in the house. "She wants to know if you are dining at home, sir?" the man said.

Hope springs eternal. Dunham started at

the question. Elizabeth! What did it mean?

"Tell her 'Yes!' " he said.

But when the man had closed the door quietly behind him Dunham told himself fiercely that he was a fool. He was a fool to think even for a moment that things could be any different. He cursed himself for a coward because he had not ended his life. And the next instant a cold sweat stood out upon his forehead as he realized how close he had been to death.

Somehow he did not want to die—not yet.

III

That night, for the first time in many months, Dunham found himself facing his wife alone across the dinner-table. To him there was something oddly unreal in the situation. He had great difficulty in persuading himself that he was not imagining the event, for Elizabeth made obvious overtures toward friendliness. He was astounded by the change that had come over her; and for a brief interval he forgot every-

thing of the agony he had suffered because he was supremely happy.

But in the midst of his bliss a horrid idea came into his head. He had been wondering what brought his wife to town at that season; and then all at once he thought of Clifton. Had she come to New York to see him? Dunham felt a sharp pang as the suspicion entered his mind. But try as he would, he could not rid himself of the conjecture. Although he despised himself for distrusting Elizabeth, he could not shake off the fear that she was hoodwinking him.

She was young, he reflected, and it was only natural that she should turn instinctively to youth. He looked at her fresh skin and was conscious of the contrast that it made with his own face, lined with the record of a life-time of struggle. He could remember Clifton as he had last seen him—eager, buoyant, debonair. And Dunham did not marvel that Elizabeth found her lover far preferable to himself.

But despite his misgivings Dunham was to Elizabeth as the moth to the flame. He ac-

cepted gratefully the favors that she bestowed upon him that evening, torn though he was by the doubts that assailed him.

IV

Weeks went by. And still Elizabeth continued to grace her husband's house with her cheerful presence. She was strangely altered. Her spirits had undergone a marvelous change which was apparent not only in her mood but in her appearance as well. Her eyes were brighter, her cheeks displayed a higher color; even her voice was pitched in a different key.

Dunham recognized the transformation in her. She was lovelier than ever. But he was utterly at a loss for an explanation of the difference in her. What was the answer to the riddle? Was it to be found in Clifton? He did not know. He was completely puzzled. For Clifton no longer visited them. Nor was he present at any of the houses of the Dunhams' friends. Ralph was at a loss to solve the problem. And then one day he came across Clifton's

name in the cable-columns of a newspaper, which mentioned the man as among guests at a European resort. So that was the reason for Clifton's absence! It did not occur to Dunham that there had been any break between his wife and her admirer. And in his harassed state of mind Dunham was plunged again into the depths of despondency.

Still Elizabeth continued to seek his society. She arranged week-end parties at The Knolls at which she insisted upon her husband being present. She organized short cruises on the *Nomad* to take place at times convenient to Dunham. And to his complete bewilderment she even asked him to accompany her upon motor trips.

It was all a mystery to him. Her actions were quite beyond his comprehension. She no longer shrank from contact with him. Indeed the tables seemed to have turned completely. Now it was Dunham who avoided her. If she brushed against him, he drew away from her. If she looked into his face when speaking to him,

his own eyes quickly shifted under her gaze. He never voluntarily sought her companionship; never suggested any project which would bring the two of them together. He was blind —absolutely blind—to the great fact that his wife's sentiments toward him had undergone an amazing change. Had he been aware of the truth he could scarcely have marveled more than did Elizabeth herself.

For she had proved the wisdom of Thomas Cartwright's words.

When the old minister revealed his magic formula to her she had been skeptical. But she had done his bidding. At first she had to steel herself to the line of conduct she was resolved to follow. But to her great astonishment it was not long before she came to regard her husband in a new light. She saw fine qualities in him that she had not discerned before. And his faults—which previously had loomed big in her eyes—now dwindled into insignificance.

As the weeks sped by (they passed quickly for her now—now that she had thrown her heart

into the performance of her duty) she found that her undertaking grew increasingly easier. And eventually the time came when she did not need to spur herself to her task. She instinctively sought her husband's society, because it had become desirable to her. And one day she discovered that she loved him.

V

It came about in this fashion. Ralph Dunham—master of men that he was, because he understood them, because he knew their virtues and their foibles—was woefully unable to fathom the minds of women. Least of all could he comprehend the actions of his own wife. He was puzzled by what seemed to him to be capriciousness on her part. Or was Elizabeth's altered demeanor deliberately planned to deceive him? He could guess nothing of her motives. The more he tried to determine what he really thought about her the more undecided he became. And if now and then he seized upon the

temporary hope that she really cared for him, he was prompt to discard it as preposterous.

The man lived in a veritable hell of doubts and fears. What could he do to relieve the anguish that was gnawing his very heart out? In his despair he went to a doctor and asked for some sedative which might at least enable him to sleep.

It was some simple drug that the physican gave him—a mild bromide, which had no more effect upon his frayed nerves than so much water. For three nights Dunham took the potion, and tossed wakefully upon his bed through hours that seemed interminable.

The fourth night, at bedtime, he pitched the powders away in disgust. And he thought grimly of that other remedy which lay in the little drawer. That, he knew, was a cure that would not fail him.

He crossed the room to the big chest and looked at the drawer. The thing had a powerful fascination for him. His hand stole out

and closed upon the crystal knob. And slowly he pulled the drawer open.

Something stirred gently in the room. It sounded like a soft foot-fall behind him; and with a start Dunham wheeled around.

It was Elizabeth. A peignoir of filmy silk clung about her and only partially concealed the snowy lingerie beneath. He could scarcely believe his eyes. She had never come to him like that before.

There was that in her husband's face which alarmed her. On it was written deep despair —unfathomable despondency. And there was a strained look about the eyes—a tenseness which both shocked and terrified her.

"What is it?" Elizabeth asked him. "There's—there's some trouble. I can feel it. Tell me!"

But he only stared at her and did not speak.

She moved nearer him and laid her hand upon his sleeve.

"Ralph!" she said. "You frighten me. Oh! what is the matter?"

"Nothing you can help," he answered, not unkindly.

"Perhaps I can," she said. "Let me try—at least let me try." She looked beyond him then and saw the revolver lying in the open drawer.

"Ralph! What are you doing with that?" she asked quickly, as an awful fear swept over her. "You weren't—" She could not finish her question. Her tongue balked at the horrid words.

Dunham's glance fell away beneath her searching gaze.

"You were—oh! God!" she cried. And she threw her arms about him protectingly.

"Don't!" he begged hoarsely. "Go away, please. It's—it's nothing. Don't be frightened."

But her woman's instinctive perception told her the truth. He could not deceive her.

"No! no!" she said hysterically. "I—I can't go. Not just yet. Don't send me away. Please!"

Ralph Dunham looked down at her as sobs interrupted her impassioned pleading, and he saw that she had guessed the truth.

"Forgive me," he said with terrible calm. "I am sorry if I startled you. But it's all right now. Please go away." He tried to free himself from her arms. "There! there!" he said. "Please! Don't make me hurt you! But you really must go now. I—I can't bear any more." He was free at last from her embrace.

"I can't leave you," she cried. And she caught his arm again and clung to him desperately. "One minute! Let me stay—just a minute!"

"Well?" He waited for her to continue. There was nothing—absolutely nothing—that he could say to her.

"Let me help you," she begged him. "You —you were going to do an awful thing. I knew there was something frightful, when you looked around at me. And when I saw that—" she shuddered as she peered at the big, blue revolver—"I knew what you meant to do. But it

can't be bad enough for that. Talk to me, Ralph! Say something! I'm your wife. I'm the very one you ought to come to when you're in trouble. You ought to come to me for comfort. Oh, Ralph! I've been a wicked woman. But I've changed. God has helped me. I'm wicked still, I suppose. And I guess I deserve any sorrow that might come to me. But I couldn't stand it if I lost you now."

Dunham looked at her wonderingly.

"I don't understand," he said, half-dazed by what she was saying. "I didn't think you would care—what happened to me. I thought you would be glad—to be set free."

"Glad?" she exclaimed.

He nodded gravely.

"Then you could marry the man you love. You could marry—Clifton."

She smiled at him through tears that trembled in her eyes.

"You don't understand," she said. "Listen! I haven't seen Craig Clifton for months. I haven't heard from him. I don't even know

where he is. I sent him away. I told him he must never see me again. Oh! haven't you seen? Haven't you known all this time? I love you, Ralph! Don't tell me it's too late!"

She clung to him desperately now, as if she feared that something would snatch him away from her. Dunham felt an exquisite thrill as her slender form pressed close against him. Her dear face was upturned to his; and her eyes besought him for the answer that she craved—yet feared he could not give her.

The miracle had happened. The thing he had hoped for in time gone by, and had relinquished as beyond the realm of possibility, had come to pass. As the light broke over him Ralph Dunham gave a great sob and gathered her inside his arms.

The blessed love which is every man's heritage had finally come to him.

VI

And so gladly she went to him, because he was her lover. And so joyously he welcomed

her because she was his beloved! So joyously that he bent down to her and kissed her sweet lips. And with her two hands clasped in his he led her from the room—away from that place where but for the grace of God he might have been lying at that very moment, beyond all capacity for sorrow or joy.

Dunham looked at her very fondly and very tenderly, in the sacred silence of her bedroom. He saw her quite distinctly, for his eyes had grown accustomed to the subdued light, and to his wonder she looked more beautiful than ever. He had not thought it possible. With her soft pale skin, and her amazing eyes, and the childish slimness of her figure, combined with certain curves that were the curves of ripening womanhood—nobody since time began had ever been quite like her, and—and Dunham desired intensely that she should belong to him.

But in humble deference to her will—for was he not her devoted knight—her humble subject—waiting in the court of love? in his great desire to do her bidding he merely sought one of

her slim hands and led her reverently to a deep, wide couch that filled one of the corners of the room.

Her eyes were wider open, less shadowed and more full of courage, and in some strange way struck him as even purer than they had been before. They had been timidly pure, now they were bravely pure.

Her lips seemed fuller and softer, and without that demure compression at the corners, which so often mars the beauty of women.

And her smile—ah! now she was ready to smile—to smile gaily, tenderly, sweetly, happily, simply, because she was at last in intimate touch with humanity, through him.

Yes, humanity was now her kinswoman. She could weep for the tears of those who wept, she could rejoice with the gladness of those who were joyous.

Birth, death, life—she seemed to understand them all at last, to marvel at their greatness, to comprehend their infinite wonder.

She had a woman's heart, and to all the world she was now able to stretch out a woman's hands. Things which had previously appeared uninteresting and barren were, for her, invested with actual fairness and grace, and her pulse beat time with humanity's pulse as the soul of a perfect dancer throbs in time to the lilt of the music.

She put her hand out and touched Dunham's. How strong and capable it was! No dream-lover of her girlhood days had ever caressed her with a hand comparable to his!

"Oh, beloved!" she whispered. "All these weeks I have longed to be here with you, away from the world, and all the ugly things in it."

Dunham felt a strange elation of spirit.

She seemed so very different from other women—(it's true she was sweet and dainty and like a thousand others who are fragrant and fair as flowers—but love's fallacious beliefs begin at the hour of love's birth!) there was an

air of unconscious appeal about her which demands masculine protection, and that air of intense magnetic femininity which compels masculine ardor and passion.

"I love you—I love you!" he murmured. And raising her hand to his lips he kissed it with all the fervor of his limitless adoration.

He was created to love this slim young girl in blue—to love her as a man never loves in his flirtations or his amours, because he could only love her as the one woman who seemed different from all the others.

He felt all this vaguely—though his thoughts came crowding too tumultuously one upon another for him to think with his accustomed clearness.

He only knew that she was Queen-Empress of that whole world that is peopled with lovers —that mystical, mythical, realm of delight called "The Land of Heart's Joy."

"I love you—I love you!" He repeated the words with a fierce intensity. "Tell me you love me!" and command and entreaty mingled

strangely in his clear, strong voice, now so curiously shaken.

"Yes—yes—" she answered softly and vaguely as the crush of his arms closed about her inevitably, and held her a prisoner.

"Yes—yes—" Elizabeth answered again. There was nothing else that she could, or needed, to say.

And her mouth and her husband's met in one long kiss.

Ah! that kiss was a beautiful kiss!

And for a time she lay passive in his arms.

Such strong, strong arms they were!—arms strong enough to be cruel if they were not passionately kind instead.

"We were made for each other, weren't we, darling? We are the only two people in our world, to-night, aren't we?" And Dunham held her yielding body close; her slim, lithe, supple form—half-real, half-sprite she seemed, in the faint light of the quiet room.

As he looked at her, he more than ever realized the completeness of her charm.

She was a woman, a woman with fervid throbbing pulses, lawful desires, passionate tremors. And he caressed her with a fierce tenderness.

THE END

In the Fall of 1914 The Macaulay Company will publish a rousing novel of love and adventure in Mexico, called

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The Trail of The Waving Palm

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¶ Its pages are alive with real people–Americans, Mexicans, and the host of soldiers of fortune from many climes whom life lures irresistably south of the Tropic of Cancer; in fact the enchantment of the sub-tropics pervades this fine, open-air story from the first chapter to the last.

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